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FEMALE IMPROVEMENT.

BY

MRS. JOHN SANDFORD,

AUTHOR OF

"WOMAN IN HER SOCIAL AND DOMESTIC CHARACTER."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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OF

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By the same Author,

LIVES

OF

LADY JANE GREY AND MRS. COLONEL HUTCHINSON.

WOMAN, IN HER SOCIAL AND DOMESTIC CHARACTER.

Fourth Edition.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE favorable reception of a former work may account for the appearance of the present Volumes. They contain the Authoress's fuller and more matured opinions upon some points touched upon in her previous publication:—they also embrace many new and important topics.

It is with much humility that they are offered to the public. They have been composed at intervals, so as not to interfere with maternal and domestic duties, or with the offices which devolve on every Clergyman's wife. But they are the fruits of study and reflection, without which they could not claim attention. The Authoress has advanced no sentiment which has not been duly weighed; and she asks from the reader that indulgence which will never be refused to a female pen.

It is her privilege to be acquainted with some of her sex who beautifully exemplify the excellence which it is the object of these pages to promote. To their friendship she is indebted for much happiness and personal improvement; and from their example she has drawn many of the lessons which she respectfully proposes to others.

She knows that they will receive her offering with sisterly kindness; and she asks them to unite with her in humble prayer that, by the Divine blessing, these volumes may subserve the cause so dear to all their hearts.

London, May, 1836.

FEMALE IMPROVEMENT.

CHAPTER I.

FORMATION OF FEMALE CHARACTER.

It has been remarked that the female mind arrives sooner at its maturity than that of the other sex: and experience seems to furnish ground for this conclusion. The intellect of woman, though its range is confined, is capable of rapid advance; and the address with which she is gifted often gains for her the credit of a proficiency to which she has scarcely attained. On this account the girl of seventeen frequently appears in advantageous contrast with the youth of the same age; and, in spite of his superior education and real attainment, we find her a more agreeable, and even a more intelligent companion.

It may, indeed, be questioned whether this superiority is real or only apparent; whether it is not the grace and naïveté of the young woman that cause her, at this season of her life, to bear away the palm. But however this may be, she is soon distanced. The next few years bring forth the vigour of the manly mind, whilst the intellect of woman makes little or no progress, and in many cases, only loses its liveliness with its bloom.

Whatever, therefore, be the comparative advance of the male and female understanding, we may inquire whether the seeming maturity of the latter does not act as a check to its improvement, and whether discipline and education are not often regarded as concluded, when they ought rather to be reckoned, as at their most important and interesting stage.

The formation of character is the great end of all instruction. It is also the result by which we are disposed to judge of the system which has been pursued. For, though education, like other moral influences, is uncertain in its operation, the probabilities of its efficiency are so much in its favour, that we cannot but attribute a failure in its success, to some fault in its principle or conduct. And when the fault is palpable, can we be surprised that its consequences should be equally obvious?

Judging, then, from what we should conceive would be the intellectual process in advancing towards maturity, an early and abrupt intermission of culture must be alike prejudicial to man and woman. We would say, indeed, that whatever may be the apparent precociousness of the female mind, it needs a longer continuance of training than that of the other sex. However promising its early blossoms may be, it has not the internal strength; and unless this is infused, the result must be disappointing.

Yet the education of woman is, in many cases, suddenly and almost mechanically arrested. The school-room machinery is, all at once, let down; and no new power is applied to keep up the action. Age alone determines the period of the change. At a prescribed season, the young woman, as a matter of course, is emancipated from tutelage, and introduced into society. There is then an end, not merely of all instruction, but frequently of all acquirement. And the preparation for this change may be peculiarly defective. There may be no attempt made to render the scholar independent, to impart a habit of thought, a desire for knowledge, or a love of study. And thus, when the restraint is taken off, there is no voluntary application. The next year or two will be probably wasted in trifling pursuits; and if regret then follows the recollection of the time that has been lost, it may be, in great measure, unavailing, for the habit of intellectual employment has been interrupted, or other engagements have intervened.

Thus the mind is stunted in its growth, and the most valuable faculties may never be fully developed. Of course the effect is sufficiently obvious. With much that is amiable and intelligent, we yet frequently see in woman an incompleteness of character. There may be no defect in talent or capacity; but there is a want of strength and consistency, a deficiency in judgment and in power.

This is, perhaps, not discerned in the common intercourse of social life. The manners of society are calculated to throw a veil over the intellectual character. And conversation is so much, and often, it would seem, so unavoidably, confined to common-place subjects, that an ordinary share of address may carry any young person safely through the ceremonial of a call or a dinner. But when topics of greater moment are introduced, when remarks are hazarded on subjects which scarcely fall within the compass of the drawing-room, the deficiency will then be perceived. We shall find that opinions have been acquiesced in through indolence; that the judgment has not been exercised on any except trivial questions; and that sentiments are adopted, or opposed, from impulse or from prejudice, rather than as the result of deliberation and conviction.

And this may be the case with reference to subjects, which professedly have been points of special attention. With regard, for instance, to religion: we cannot now say, as we might justly have remarked a century ago, that religious instruction, at least in its elements, does not form a part of early female education. Whilst there may be much that is faulty in the manner of communicating it, and much that is defective in the system that is taught, still the subject is admitted by all as an essential branch of tuition.

Yet religion is a point, in approaching which, in social intercourse, persons of real reflection are, perhaps, the most generally disappointed. The notions entertained on it by women appear often to be received only second-hand, and to be by no means the result of actual thought or of personal investigation. A little girl fresh from the school-room may give a tolerable account of her creed, because it is newly learnt, and because we expect her to present to us only a transcript of her instructions. But the religion of a young woman should be more than a mere lesson, or a borrowed opinion. It should be more than a fashionable system, or a speculative conceit. If it involves responsibilities which cannot be delegated, and interests for which each must herself provide, it is surely a matter for our individual inquiry, and on which we all should prepare ourselves to think.

Here, however, we may too frequently observe that personal reflection has not been exercised. Opinions may be repudiated when conveyed in an obnoxious phraseology, which, when clothed in a more alluring garb, will be unsuspectingly received. Or theories of questionable authority, when put forth with confidence, will find unhesitating acceptance, whilst the more diffident advocate for truth obtains far less implicit credence. And even,—so little may the understanding be informed, or the judgment enlightened, — an assent will be readily accorded to quite contradictory statements; and we are made to feel how little dependence can be placed on principles, which are professed, without being understood.

It may be said, however, that such indecision and ignorance on religious subjects, are rather a moral than an intellectual fault; that they proceed, not from a defect in the conduct of mind, but from the want of that superinduced principle which is the origin of all spiritual knowledge:—that they are, in short, not the result of controllable causes, but of the deprivation of that one efficient influence to which we are alone indebted for the formation of religious character. To this we can only reply, that the remarks that have been made are simply practical, and that they in no degree interfere with the doctrine of Spiritual Influence. Divine Grace is, indeed, the only effectual teacher, and often does it impart that lucid order in matters of heavenly science, which marks the proficient in Christian attainment. But the mind that is under proper discipline, is in a state far more favourable to the reception of religious truth than one, the energies of which are not in full and healthy action. The spiritual appeal is usually made by the instrumentality of ordinary influences; and, in proportion as the faculties of mind are in a vigorous state, they are accessible to the persuasions of truth. On the contrary, the undisciplined mind presents no free and open ground for the power of convincing; it is altogether uncertain; for, in religion, and in every other subject, the best cause is fairly and honestly decided, only when it can refer to the award of a sound and efficient judgment.

Want of thought is one great cause of the weakness lamented. The mind can never attain to its maturity that is not exercised by thinking. On this account the course prescribed to men is one of severe application. The knowledge they acquire is valuable, not for its own sake alone, but because it involves study. And why is it that those,who have earned the academic honours of youth, usually make good the promise of their early years? Is it because they are familiar with books which, in after-life, they may never look into? Is there an intrinsick charm in Aristotle, Æschylus, or Pindar; or does not their virtue mainly consist, in the thought which they call forth, and in the application which is required for their mastery?

We do not mean to suggest such studies to young women. It is said, indeed, that the Greek Chair at Bologna was once filled by a female Professor, and that she bore her learning and her honours with feminine grace: but we do not propose her as a model. Yet we may assuredly ask, is it not of the utmost importance that the female mind should not be suffered to lie fallow in its prime; and that the pains bestowed upon its early culture should not be lost by subsequent inaction?

We often hear of the frivolity of the sex. We hear it laid to the charge of women, that unless they have family duties, they seem to have no pursuits: that with no deficiency of intelligence they have yet little desire for improvement; and that it is not easy to excite their interest in any thing beyond a book of entertainment, or the occurrences of the day. But we can scarcely be surprised at this, when we recollect how the years of youthful energy are often spent. It is a bright season, youth; a season when the understanding is in its full play; when, like every other faculty, it has pleasure in putting forth its powers, and when the very consciousness of vigorous action is itself a happiness. Yet this season is often frittered away in pursuits which are worse than useless. The character which has just begun to develope itself, — the mind which has just discovered its own capabilities, — are treated as if they had reached perfection, and as if further care and further discipline were not required. Can we then wonder that the work is incomplete, — that the movement is even retrograde, — and that the young girl, fresh from the school-room, is sometimes a more interesting and intellectual person than the full-grown woman?

Youth is confessedly the golden season of life. To none is it more eminently so than to the young woman. Freed, for a while, from care,—full of life and hope,—capable of exertion,—conscious of vigour, she has only to apply her energies to what is good, and she may taste some of the highest and purest pleasures which bless the human path. Ambition tempts her not with its poisoned cup; neither, though the taint of sin is in her heart, need the evil tendency be excited and increased by collision with the world. Who does not wish to recall that joyous time; and, though not to live it over again as it was spent,—for, like every period of this sad pilgrimage, it is marked with grief, and pain, and folly,—yet, who would not desire to experience once more the same freshness, the same glow, the same animation,—to rise once more with the same elasticity,—and to feel that the morning of life is bright with promise, and that the early sun of hope is flinging its roseate hues upon the opening prospect? The enchantment is gone by,—the vision is departed,—the sober realities of existence have dispelled the illusion, and the spring of the young and sanguine mind is for ever fled.

But is a period so favourable to attainment and to progress to be lost? It is the season of hope:—not only *that;*—it is the time when reason gathers strength, and when the mind is first capable of judgment. Childhood can learn: but its powers are chiefly mechanical and imitative. Reason, we all know, is of the latest growth. We may remark this even in our nurseries. The infant that is quite capable of intimating its wishes, is yet at a loss when required to compare; and tries to grasp *all*, or gives its preference by chance. And we may observe, too, that it is the imperfection of the discriminating and deliberative faculties that chiefly constitutes the intellectual weakness of childhood. We are often surprised at the facility with which very young people acquire, and are again disappointed at their inability to think and judge. Possibly memory may be in the fullest exercise, when the powers of the mind are concentrated in the mechanical process, and when the higher faculties are, comparatively with a later period, lying dormant. But, however this may be, youth is the time when all that has been stored away in childhood is first applied, and brought to use. It is the time when, both in opinion and in action, discernment begins to be exercised. And it is therefore the time of all others, when it is important to give a right direction to the judgment, and to instruct and discipline the pilot that is in future to guide the helm.

Let it not be said that women are incapable of reasoning, and that their deficiency in this respect is not the result of false treatment, but is innate and organic. If there is a weakness in the sex,—if they are apt to decide capriciously and from impulse,—if sometimes they even seem incapable of that intellectual stretch which is essential for the process of serious thought,—is this not to be ascribed rather to the little care that is taken to teach and train their mind at the most critical period of its growth? At a time when young men are undergoing the strictest discipline,—when many of their studies are expressly for the purpose of strengthening the mind,—young women, as we have seen, are for the most part allowed to consider that they have nothing further to do in the way of education. In many cases, so far from being encouraged to bend their attention to profitable application, and invigorate their understandings by wholesome exercise, a thousand frivolous interruptions are forced upon them; and they find themselves involved in company and engagements, to the sacrifice of their time, the enervation of their character, and the prevention of their further progress. Is it then matter of surprise, that they should yield to the idleness to which youth is naturally prone, and should omit to impose on themselves that discipline which their instructors seem to regard as no longer essential?

This neglect of the season of adolescence is to be lamented on many accounts; on none more, than because youth is the period when sentiment is first felt, and taste developed. The mind of a child is scarcely susceptible of poetry. Let us recall ourselves the first impressions of its influence—the first opening of nature to our eyes—the first perception of beauty. Was it not at that period when we first put away childish things? Were we not then sensible of emotions to which, hitherto, we had been strangers; and can we not now recollect the delighted surprise with which we welcomed our new capacity of intellectual pleasure? The landscape burst upon us with the blush of spring; and, together with our appreciation of its loveliness, came all those fine and delicate perceptions, which, if sometimes the cause of much pain, are the source of some of our sweetest enjoyments, and the breathings of our more exalted nature. It was then, too, that we first felt the enchanter's wand, that our hearts kindled with the poetic fire, and that the immortal numbers, as they fell in music on our ears, awoke a chord of sympathy within our breasts.

We knew not what poetry was till then — the poetry of nature or of art; and though we had gamboled on the green turf, and plucked the summer flowers, and drank in the freshness of the evening breeze, we were insensible to the inspiration which lends to external beauty the charm of sentiment.

As yet our minds had not tasted the conceptions of the poet. In vain had we been taught to render homage to the immortal bards; in vain did the assiduity of our teachers cull for us the most delicious blossoms, and endeavour to tempt our steps to the Pierian spring. The sense was yet to be acquired, the appetite yet to be excited: and though we had gone through every gradation, from the nursery rhymes to the epic song, yet the sublimity and the pathos of the celestial art were equally unfelt, and Milton and Gray, Dante and Petrarcha, were recollected only as affording material for a lesson.

But to a mind that is at all susceptible of the higher emotions, the sentiment for poetry is called forth at the time when the other intellectual faculties are advancing to maturity. The latent enthusiasm is then excited; the golden tint, with which nature is invested, then seems to be reflected back to us in the mystic numbers; and the emotions, of which the heart is full, find their transcript and expression in the poetic page. The stores, too, of imagination are unsealed; literature affords new and untasted enjoyments: and the sensibilities of the mind become more acute by collision with sympathies, to which the inspiration of the bard has given utterance.

But it may be said that this sudden accession of taste is by no means universal; for that minds of ordinary stamp are at no period distinguished by such elevation. Granting, however, that the view that has been expressed may be somewhat exaggerated, and true in its extent only in particular instances; granting, too, on the other hand, that there may be a far earlier developement of poetic feeling, and that the infant bard may "lisp in numbers;" yet it can scarcely be questioned but that there is in youth a susceptibility of fine impressions, and of sentiments which belong, at least, to the poetic. Imagination and feeling are in full play; they have, as yet, received no check: no discordant string has jarred upon the sensibilities, or destroyed the harmony, of the young and happy mind.

But, if it be so, — if youth be the period of sentiment, how important that the flame thus kindled should burn in its purity, and should be supplied with fitting nourishment! On this the future well-being much depends. For the poetic sensibility is not a mere intellectual taste; it involves a state of feeling which bears materially upon ,the character: nursed and petted into a morbid irritability, or chastened into a pure and holy sentiment, it becomes either a source of misery, or a spring of noble and virtuous action.

There is, indeed, no reason to complain that the taste of which we have been speaking is not sufficiently called forth. The danger rather is, lest it should be excessively and injudiciously stimulated; and the more so, as the nature of the excitement is sometimes very questionable. The food so abundantly supplied, and swallowed even to surfeit, is calculated rather to induce fever, than to call forth a healthful energy. It is apt, too, to render a more wholesome diet unpalatable. Works of fiction, when they form, as it is to be feared they too frequently do, the almost entire reading of young women, pamper both the taste and fancy, and, far from inspiring a delicacy of feeling, blunt even the natural sensibilities. It is not merely that the imagination is by them too exclusively brought into play; nor is it that the moral tendency of much of this captivating literature is far from good; nor is it that it engrosses time which might be more profitably spent: but, when the novel is the only refuge in a wet day, the only panacea against ennui, the only substitute for company, the feelings, from a perpetual application of a false stimulus, lose by degrees their tone, and the mind acquires a listless habit which incapacitates it for even ordinary exertion.

Such reading, too, contributes nothing towards what ought to be the paramount object, as well with young people themselves as with their parents and instructors; namely, the formation of their character. For this end, the education of childhood has been merely preliminary. As a preparation, indeed, early discipline is essential; but it is only a first step. And let us not expect too much from childhood. Let us not seek to make our children little women, whilst our women are often nothing better than grown girls. Let us not force the earliest shoots by over culture, and relax our care when the young plant begins to put forth its strength.

Childhood may be too much burdened: the

elasticity of the spirit may be broken down, and the mind fatigued with unremitting application. The expediency of such early and unrelaxing restraint is surely very questionable. And, if such be the system pursued in the first years, it is the more inconsistent to loose the reins all at once, and to leave the mind, which has hitherto implicitly leant on the guidance of others, entirely, and suddenly, to its own resources and its own conduct.

Frivolity of character is but the too natural consequence of such a system. The occupations that supersede the engagements of the school-room are not calculated to improve the mind. Masters and lessons are given up; and visiting, shopping, light reading, and the more trivial accomplishments, are, too often, all that are substituted in their place. For every circumstance and condition there is ever ready some engrossing trifle: and the construction of a purse or the embroidering a waistcoat are amongst the most important avocations of the day.

We can expect no intellectual superiority from those who are thus habituated to pass their time. It is not surprising if, in conversation, they discover few symptoms of thought, and little or no interest in subjects which require reflection. But we must regret that their powers are thus wasted, and their abilities misapplied. For the end of life is not mere existence; neither is it selfish and passing gratification. Women, as well as men, have high and holy duties. They have much to learn, to suffer, and to do. If it is not their's to engage in the most stirring concerns, their offices equally require elevation and energy of mind. And, whatever be their station, they are not exempt from obligations which demand intellectual and moral effort; neither may they be content to pass through their pilgrimage here, the indolent recipients of external impressions.

If we observe who they are, among women, who really obtain the respect of society, we shall find them firm in purpose, and vigorous in action; their enthusiasm chastened by judgment, their energy by feminine conduct and taste.

Nor can we admit that the highest qualities, moral and intellectual, are not needed in the routine of life; or that a woman possessed of them finds her place only in singular circumstances. There is not a duty which one so gifted will not fulfil better than a merely ordinary person. The piety of the daughter, the devotion of the wife, the self-denial of the mother, the patience of the nurse,—these and such like graces will be exhibited by her in all their unpretending excellence; and there will be in her a readiness and a power to carry through every important undertaking, and to meet every emergency.

Contrast the points of her character with those of the mere trifler: the true generosity of the one with the selfishness of the other; the enthusiasm of the one with the inanity of the other; the ability of the one with the unprofitableness of the other. In whatever way the difference is viewed, whether in the superiority of endurance over restless anxiety, of forbearance over teasing and meddling impatience, of buoyancy of spirit over nervous weakness, it is at once the test and proof of a woman's worth. Either she is a mere toy, the plaything of an hour, which loses at once its beauty and its value; or she is a gem, the brilliancy of which fades not by long possession, and the preciousness of which is not deteriorated by fashion or caprice.

It is for a young woman to make her choice; to decide between the short butterfly existence of a few seasons, and a life worthy an intellectual and immortal being; between the admiration of an hour, and the love of years; between passing pleasure and lasting happiness. For on the use she makes of her early energies,—on the conduct of her mind, when it is capable of the most vigorous action, — on the discipline of her heart when it is susceptible of the most lively impressions, will mainly depend what she will henceforth be. She will either be the mere unit, whose individuality is scarcely recognised in the sum of human existence; or she will fulfil the end of her creation, and, as far as her influence extends, benefit her fellow creatures. She will either be the trifler, that flutters past; is seen, admired, and forgotten; or the rational, intelligent, and religious woman, happy in the consciousness of doing good, and blessed in the belief that, amongst those whom it is her virtuous ambition to please, she is, herself, not unvalued.

CHAPTER II.

RELIGION,—A RULING PRINCIPLE.

It may be remarked, that unity of purpose is one of the usual characteristics of a superior mind. To have one end in view, to be guided by one principle, to which other motives, however powerful, are still subordinate, is the part of the truly wise. We may learn this from observing who it is that are most successful in the world; and from contrasting their steadiness of design, and patience in execution, with the instability of others who attain to no eminence. It seems, indeed, that the concentration of our faculties is essential to their energy; and that, unless they are made to bear upon some definite and permanent object, they are never fully developed.

Nothing is more important in the discipline of the mind than an attention to this principle. It is notorious how much more we acquire, and how much more valuable is our acquisition to us, when we have a fixed end in view, than when we learn without reference to a special purpose. In the former case, all our faculties are awake; we are ever on the look-out for information; and we treasure up all that we can glean from observation or research, for the purpose of extracting from it what may subserve our favourite object. On the contrary, when our strokes are aimless, their result is unsatisfactory; and, though we may gain some knowledge in a desultory way, there is a want of arrangement in our materials, and even of accuracy in our information, which detracts greatly from their value. In short, we are apt to learn to but little purpose, unless we learn for a specific end; and unless, in the culture of our intellectual faculties, we are stimulated by the prospect of a goal, to which our efforts, however various, are all directed.

If this principle be true as it regards the regulation of the mind, we may be disposed to admit it with reference to conduct generally. Unity of design is the best guarantee for consistency. It is when we act upon principle;

when our desires centre mainly in the attainment of one object, that we pursue a steady course, and succeed not merely in our immediate aim, but render ourselves better qualified to arrive at general excellence. We feel then that we are in earnest; we understand ourselves, and our motives; the spring of action, whatever it may be, imparts energy to our character; and our moral and intellectual faculties, our passions and affections, all receive that impulse which insures their co-operation, and their relative subserviency to each other.

The more disposed we are to admit this, the more sensible shall we be of the importance attaching to the choice of the principle which is thus to bear so materially upon conduct. From it character will take its tone; on it depend the sensibility of the moral feelings, the complexion of the mind, the bearing of the actions, and, lastly, our notions of happiness. It, in short, in great measure determines what we shall be; and though it may, in itself, admit of modification, or be liable to change,—though it may be for a while lost sight of, or may yield a temporary subjection to some other potent and present influence, yet it will resume its sway, and, like the master passion, gather strength even from a temporary suspension of its powers.

There are certain principles which are from their nature so engrossing, that, if their influence be really admitted, they must be predominant and paramount.

Such a principle, pre-eminently, is Religion. Whatever sway other sentiments may have acquired, this, when recognised, must be supreme. Not that Religion disallows other springs of conduct.[a] Having established her claim to the first place, she acts upon subordinate motives,—which are the natural and immediate causes of ordinary actions,—chiefly as a check.

There is no sentiment which, in its nature, extent, and influence, is so akin to Religion as Love. Religion, in fact, is love; love of the highest order—spiritual, and permanent as to the object on which it is placed. Religion is as engrossing as Love—the main-spring of conduct, the abiding influence which animates the soul, stimulates to exertion, and controls other and inferior feelings. Religion, like Love, has its seat in the heart: its appeals are addressed to it; its impressions are all there; it is from thence that it sends forth the rays, which vivify the system.

Yet the circumstance of Religion being so akin to Love, and of the affections being so much involved in it, may be the cause of self-delusion with regard to the reality of its influence. It is possible to mistake earthly passion for pure and spiritual feeling; and what is merely a human sentiment, for that high and holy love, which has heaven for its source, and God only for its object. And, no doubt, it is the gentler sex who are the most liable to such an error. All women, it is said by one who well knew the female heart, love, have loved, or are capable of loving. Love is the warm enthusiasm which, in youth especially, glows in their hearts, and renders them susceptible of every tender emotion. They love the natural creation; they love all that is morally amiable; they live to love. True, the sentiment may be elevated, the natural impulse may become a holy aspiration, and the tender confiding spirit may find in Heaven the sympathy it longs for, and seek the home of its affections there :—but it may be otherwise,—and then the passion that has been nurtured by false impressions, and under a false name, subsides, and shows its fallacy by its transitoriness, or it assumes some different aspect, and produces results unsatisfactory or prejudicial.

But, though spiritual affection may have its counterfeit, religion is not the less a sentiment of love. And as the object of it is infinitely higher than that of any other sentiment, so the homage rendered ought to be proportionably intense.

It is the regarding of religion in this light that explains to us the obligation of its being a paramount principle. What human being is satisfied with a divided heart? Is the friend—the lover—the parent—or the husband? Even the gradations that must obtain—the gradations which nature dictates, and reason and duty sanction—prove to us, still more clearly, that Heaven must have the highest place. If it has not this, it has nothing: if the object of religious faith be not welcomed to the heart with supreme preference,—if the breathings of the spirit towards its heavenly Lord be not "whom do I desire in comparison of thee?"—religion is yet unknown; the love of God is yet unfelt; the noblest sentiment that can fill the breast is yet a stranger to the bosom; and that principle, which is the one true source of virtue and happiness, has not yet shed its gracious influence on the soul.

Philosophy could teach this, when it placed the sum of duty and enjoyment in the contemplation of the Divine Essence. Reason can teach this, when, tracing the Creator through his works, she recognises him as the source of goodness, and confesses him worthy the highest tribute which the heart can pay. And Nature teaches this, in the secret longings of the soul for unseen and untasted perfection,—longings which no created good can satiate, and which are the silent but sure indications of the existence of an object capable of satisfying this immortal thirst. But, oh! much more does Christianity teach this, when to the expectant spirit it displays the unveiled fulness of the Deity, the glorious vision of Him whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, clad in mortal flesh, and interesting the human heart by means of its tenderest sympathies and purest affections. It is Christianity, the messenger of good tidings, the harbinger of peace, that claims the vacant throne in our affections for Him, whom she reveals in the plenitude of his glory and his condescension, the High and Holy One whom angels worship, and the Saviour and Friend of man; the Creator of the universe, and the sinless participator in human infirmity.

Christianity must therefore be a ruling principle; it must occupy the chief place: it would be an affront to offer it any other. And what is there so worthy? If the philosopher of old, by the faint glimmerings which he caught of the divine effulgence, perceived that the fruition of Deity alone could satisfy the craving of the spirit, and ought to be the first aim of the sentient being; how much more may the Christian feel, to whom the gates of heaven are opened wide, that the religion which the Bible reveals ought to have the pre-eminence!

It is from not understanding the nature, and considering the claims, of religion, that the ideas which prevail upon the subject are often so vague. Some profession of it is deemed requisite: as it respects women, religion is viewed, in the worldly estimate, as a decency and propriety which it is not becoming to neglect. But what is it which, according to this standard, is thought to constitute religion? A few solitary actions which have no bearing upon character, which are performed as a mere punctilio, and which, so far from themselves really involving religion, are useful only as they may possibly contribute to the formation of a religious principle within the breast.

A young woman, for instance, will be called religious if she appears regularly at the house of worship. She may have devoted the week to the world; but if she retain some scruples with reference to the Sabbath, and obey the periodical summons to the house of God, she obtains credit for a due regard to religious duties. Doubtless, the effort is praiseworthy: it may demand the sacrifice of an hour's sleep, or a morning's amusement. And the service itself must not be undervalued: it may be made a means of spiritual benefit, and produce results such as were not contemplated by the formalist herself.

But it cannot be imagined, that such an act, in itself, has virtue to convey the stamp of religion to the character; that the mere compliance with an ordinance constitutes piety. It may be a decency, or a superstition; but assuredly it is not religion. Religion is nothing less than the rendering to God the chief place in the affections, and the taking his will as the ruling principle of life.

The same remark applies to all other external services. The means of religious instruction and improvement are too frequently mistaken for their end. Some rest their claims to piety on an attendance on the Lord's table; others, on the daily reading of the Scriptures; others, on family or private devotion. The more spiritual the office, the more reason we have to hope that the wish to perform it proceeds from a spiritual principle; but its mere observance argues nothing. A blessing may, indeed, attend its practice; — even in a formal routine of religious service the flame may be kindled; and the heartless ceremony become the devout exercise. And so often does a conscientious performance of external duties result in an internal enlightenment, that we would fain believe that there are links in the chain of heavenly mercy more than we know of; and that the grain of mustard seed, in its minuteness, as well as in its growth, is but a faint emblem of the embryo principle of divine grace.

Still religion consists not in form; neither is it an iteration of isolated duties. It is a principle which prevails, not for an hour or a day; but which is continually present; and which, by enlightening the conscience, restores to it its functions, and renders it an habitual and a faithful guide.

It is by considering what religion really is, that we are enabled to correct some misconceptions with regard to it. To value its excellence, an infused taste is requisite. Still many may be deterred from even an approach to piety by the uninviting aspect under which they view it. They imagine it a sort of Brahminical superstition, enjoining all that is irksome, prohibiting all that is agreeable, and proportioning its rewards to the number and extent of its self-denying services.

This is indeed different from the true portraiture of religion. Religion, from its capacity to inspire happiness, invites especially the young and ardent mind. It is, as we have seen in its nature, a service of love; and unless cheerfully rendered, it is of no avail. Far from proscribing enjoyment, it is religion which leads to the fountain of all joy; which elevates to spiritual pleasures, and gives a purer relish for the blessings which we meet with here; and which alone teaches us how to gather from created good its sweets, and to reject its mischief.

Religion, however, to be thus effective, must be felt as the source and spring of happiness, as the influence which is to guide and gladden us here, and the hope which gives to the future a bright and glorious aspect. Its paramount importance must be established as essential; and we must feel it our first duty to understand religion as a revelation, and to conform to it as a rule of life. It must, in short, be chief in our considerations; so that it may act as an habitual curb or motive, and be taken into account under every circumstance.

The magnitude of the interests involved in religion, independently of its intrinsic claims, require that it should thus be made a primary object. Who that compares the value of earthly gifts with that of the soul, can hesitate as to the degree of solicitude which ought to be bestowed on each? And who that reflects on the tenure of existence here, can think any period of its duration too early, to assure the safety of the immortal spirit?

Youth, doubtless, is the æra at which we ought to make our choice, and thus decide the complexion of our future years. This equally holds with women as with men. There is one consideration which peculiarly operates on the gentler sex: — their period of independence is often short, and therefore they should avail themselves of it, to decide for themselves on that question, which, of all others, the most concerns them. Religion, in their case, comes in very ill as an afterthought: they have, it is probable, at a later period, "to please their husbands," as well as "to please the Lord;" and sad it is for the wife, awakened *singly* to a sense of spiritual obligations, to find her first social duty interfering, perhaps, with a still higher claim, and an absence of sympathy, on the part of him, whom she loves the best, on the subject which most interests her.

On the contrary, how much care does a young woman spare herself, who, as soon as she is competent, chooses the good part. Her course is then marked out, her heart finds its asylum, she takes to herself a guide which in all difficulties opens to her a safe path, and strengthens her to follow it. In religion, her mind finds topics for reflection; her affections, objects worthy of their ardour; and all the impulses, which, in youth, are ready to expand, and lead her forth to action, discover an ample and a safe sphere in Christian exercises, and in the discharge of the evangelic precepts.

And as happiness depends not so much upon external circumstances as upon internal feelings, if we admit that the paramount influence, whatever it may be, affects not merely our character, but our estimate of good; we shall see that nothing can give so sure a promise of content as the fixing our desires upon objects which cannot disappoint them. Let us once know that, beyond and above this world, and all its changes, there is that which can satiate our soul, — secured to us beyond the possibility of failure; — let us lay hold of this steadfast anchor, and we shall be prepared to encounter and endure all the disquietudes of life. We shall pass through the scenes that may await us with calm and hopeful tranquillity, shall see the light shining behind the darkest cloud, and be cheered in the valley of the shadow of death with the view of approaching glory.

CHAPTER III.

ON RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE.

My little boy was asked, the other day, why he believed in such a doctrine? "Because mamma told me," was his reply. The answer, it must be confessed, was not satisfactory, but it was natural; and it stated probably the true grounds upon which a child's faith rests. Veneration is a prominent feature in the young mind; and until it is counteracted by the growth of other faculties, and the operation of external causes, it has the greatest share in determining the early character.

The influence of example upon children proves how actively veneration is in play even in the years of infancy. A child assimilates itself to those he sees; and therefore a child furnishes no unfair criterion of the character of the higher inmates of his household. And although the sentiment of veneration varies in degree, according to innate disposition or the influence of other causes, yet it may be remarked that it operates the most strongly where education has been the most carefully attended to, and where the young pupils have been accustomed to obtain satisfaction by an appeal to those on whose judgment they naturally rely.

To speak of the responsibility thus incurred by first teachers is not the present intent; neither is it to analyze, or account for the existence of the principle to which allusion has been made, nor to say, to what degree, it ought to be encouraged. Those who are the instructors of childhood must often be grateful for the prevalence of the sentiment, as it operates in relation to themselves; for, however much they may desire to simplify truth, and to give a reason for what they propound as essential principles, they must feel that they are often constrained to draw largely on their own credit, as a pledge for their veracity; and must allow, that their personal authority has no inconsiderable share in guaranteeing the first lessons which they teach.

Implicit trust, however, is the habit natural only to childhood. In the age which follows, a habit of inquiry usually springs up. Here, then, is the critical period of early life: here is the time when tenderness and judgment should guide the hand of the trainer; and when, on the bias given to the youthful shoot, the growth of the future plant depends.

Those who have remarked the workings of their own minds, or who have watched, with precision and care, the intellectual growth of others, will be disposed to admit that there is a moment when questions, as to those points which have hitherto been received on authority, first begin to suggest themselves; and when the mind assumes a posture of inquiry, the very reverse of that attitude of reliance, in which it has, till then, quietly reposed. It may be, that, from the imperfect sketch of a child's comprehension, we may sometimes not be sorry to avail ourselves of the disposition to believe us for our own sakes; still, however, we may wish that the credulity of our pupils was something less, that they would not so readily take us at our word, but would, themselves, ask for proofs level to their understandings, and thus be better furnished with reasons, for what we wish them to believe. But, if the spirit of inquiry requires excitement and fostering in early childhood, it soon shoots forth in spontaneous and prurient growth, and, unless repressed or thwarted, it will not rest, until it has obtained satisfaction.

No doubt, this propensity to inquire is the first symptom of the developement of the reasoning faculties; it is the first indication that the mind gives of superior intelligence — the first extension of those intellectual feelers which grasp at knowledge infinite and eternal. We should assuredly rejoice in this promise of power, in this dawn of the higher capacities of the mind; and hail, as we do the first independent essays of infant pedestrianism, the earliest attempts of the youthful understanding to think and reason for itself.

There is no cause for believing that this disposition is peculiar only to the superior sex. The general course of female education is, indeed, not calculated to encourage any independent effort of the reasoning faculties: but though in woman, there is, and perhaps ought to be, a natural propensity to rely on the guidance of others, yet, even in her, the passage from childhood to adolescence is marked by a desire to investigate what before has been taken for granted. On the treatment, then, of the mind during this process, depends much of its subsequent complexion; and, when we either neglect to notice its workings, or to render just that wise and timely aid which the delicacy of the case requires, we fail in what is by far the most important point of the discipline of the understanding; and that at the most critical juncture of its progress. For the spirit of inquiry may resolve itself into one of scepticism, and doubts be entertained which subsequent conviction can hardly overcome: or the mind may fall back upon prejudices, and, for want of a better resting-place, take refuge in the supposed infallibility of the doctrines it has been taught; or a trifling or indolent habit may be contracted that will check the search after truth; so that the wholesome desire for satisfaction may subside into an indifference to all serious subjects, and a distaste for every thing that requires thought.

And hence may result the imperfect notions which are sometimes rested in, upon the most important of all subjects. Religious inquiries frequently suggest themselves to the young mind:—they are entertained with anxiety; and require to be answered with tenderness and judgment. But if such questions do not arise, or are discouraged or suppressed;—if to the lessons of childhood nothing is added in the next stage of life; if no more advanced instruction is then given on a subject, which of all others affords the deepest matter for reflection; is it surprising that the opinions formed are inaccurate, and that the knowledge attained of even primary truths, is scanty and superficial?

It has been already remarked that instruction on at least the elementary points of religious doctrine, is now regarded as an indispensable branch of education. But the indeterminate nature of the views entertained by some young persons, the incorrectness of their system, the incongruity and inconsistency of their creed, show that they are but imperfectly grounded in even the first principles of Christian faith; and that they have given but little attention to a subject which they profess to consider as all-important. And thence arise dissatisfaction with themselves, repugnance to examine and thus detect the faults of their own theology, and a shrinking from an inquiry which demands an application of the mind to a speculative and spiritual subject, and might involve a conviction of previous error, and self-reproach for previous negligence.

Nor are the habits of young women always calculated to encourage the serious thought which religious inquiry calls for. The occupations and engagements of many tend rather to make study and application irksome; and therefore they are content to think that, beyond a few ordinary and obvious duties, they need give themselves little pains about their system of theology. With this impression, therefore, they are satisfied to be more ignorant of religion than of any thing else, and believing that it contains mysteries hard to be understood, to make no effort to unravel them.

And this, it is to be feared, is the case not only with the most frivolous and worldly. In families where a higher and better tone prevails, the acquaintance with some of the most important and practical doctrines of religion is sometimes far from satisfactory. Young persons are not accurately grounded on spiritual subjects, so that when any point of religious faith becomes a question, the mind is not prepared to repel error, nor even to discriminate between it and truth.

To undervalue the consideration of the external evidences is perhaps the tendency of some well-meaning persons. Yet a neglect of these argues both a want of watchfulness against ordinary dangers, and of knowledge of the true principles of faith. The great preparatory point to establish in all religious instruction is, the infallibility of Scripture. Let the mind once be brought implicitly to credit the Bible, as the word of God, and it can do no other than receive the doctrines that are contained in it. Unbelief in the Christian system ordinarily arises from not considering the appeal to Scripture as conclusive, from hesitating to recognise its claim to inspiration, and consequently disallowing its paramount authority. And therefore the arguments which bring to the authenticity and genuineness of the sacred writings a testimony equal, at least, to what can be adduced in favour of any standard work of antiquity, should be laid before young persons, and be made familiar to their minds. How else can they satisfy the inquiries which are so likely to arise in their own hearts? How else are they prepared to repel the attacks from without, to which, an ordinary intercourse with society, or even, acquaintance with literature (to our shame it must be confessed) renders them liable? What safeguard can they otherwise oppose to insinuations of the sceptic, to the practical unbelief that pervades the world? When we place in the hands of our daughters the fascinating pages of the historian of their own country, is it enough that we denounce his infidel opinions, if we furnish them with no means wherewith to counteract them,—no shield to blunt the edge of his sarcasm, and to guard against his ungodly sneer? It would seem as if we calculated upon a natural propensity to faith rather than to unbelief; as if we imagined that prescription was the best safeguard to principle, and that it was enough to represent infidelity as criminal, without proving that it is also irrational and unwise.

The evidence that is brought to bear upon the authority of Scripture is so harmonious and complete that it cannot be traced even through its most simple and obvious links without admiration. It furnishes a delightful subject of research, and one which, from its bringing into easy play the reasoning powers, is eminently calculated to improve the mind. From the examination of the general argument which, grounded on rules by which all evidence is attested, concludes so triumphantly for the truth of Revelation, and leaves the candid inquirer without the shadow of a doubt; to the tracing of the minute coincidences which stamp, as with an autograph, every portion of the sacred writings, and render one book corroborative of another, there is no investigation, which, in relation either to its end, or to the steps by which it is conducted, is equally important, and equally satisfactory. The examination, for instance, of the argument of the Horæ Paulinæ, or the making fresh applications of the same principle, and discovering by its means new examples of the accuracy of the sacred authors, is a study so satisfactory that it needs not the eloquence of Paley to recommend it. And though the young female inquirer may shrink from more laborious researches; though she may find Butler hard to be understood, and be unable to master all the arguments which Christian learning can adduce in support of Christian truth; yet she should be encouraged to lay deep the foundation of her faith, both that she may fully satisfy her own mind, and that she may be enabled, whenever called on, to give a reason for the hope that is in her.

The faith of the understanding is intimately connected with that of the heart; and whatever tends to strengthen the one, is calculated, by divine grace, to infuse life into the other. And nothing is more satisfactory to the Christian disciple than to be able to put down, by a reference to arguments which have for ever set at rest the question, the sceptical doubts which the Tempter, at every stage of spiritual progress, takes occasion to suggest.

There is, besides, a collateral benefit to be derived from studying the evidences of Christianity, of which some of the religious errors of the present day have taught us the importance. By acquainting ourselves with the grounds on which God asks for our belief in his own interposition, we learn to discriminate between what are certain, and what are questionable, proofs of a divine interference; and the same principles which warrant our faith in the *true* revelation render us suspicious of all pretensions which cannot stand an equal scrutiny. It is a striking proof, both of the mercy and wisdom of God, that, in a matter so important as that of a communication from himself, he appeals to a criterion which cannot be mistaken, and submits the tokens by which he authenticates his message to no less an evidence than that of our senses. They, indeed, are the legitimate judges of miracles; for they, when in combined and healthful action, are not capable of mistake; and, therefore, to them were the signs which attested Christianity addressed. Visions and revelations, however sublime and ecstatic, are not the evidences upon which our faith is demanded: the heavenly manifestations of Patmos, or of the mount of

Transfiguration, afforded, no doubt, to those who were their privileged spectators, a certain assurance of the reality of the glories *they* had seen; but the signs, which to us authenticate the finger of God, are even more infallible than a merely spiritual and exclusive revelation, and are open to the scrutiny of those that believe not, as well as of those that believe.

The better, therefore, that we are instructed in the evidences upon which Christianity rests, the more cautious shall we be in admitting new claims to a supernatural interference, or in crediting assumptions which are not guaranteed by the same character and degree of proof. It is probable that the fanatical errors of the present day would scarcely have found so many votaries, especially amongst the gentler sex, had young women been better instructed in the grounds of their professed belief, — had they proved the foundation of truth, — had they, in short, received the creed they acknowledge, not as a matter of routine, or of tuition, but of knowledge and conviction. There is no better safeguard against credulity than a sound and well-instructed faith. The mind really imbued with an assurance of the authority of the one true revelation from Heaven, is jealous of all false pretensions to equal honour; and, accustomed to scrutinise before it yields its confidence, regards the being asked to credit what is advanced upon questionable testimony almost as an affront. It has not taken imagination or mere feeling for an adequate guide in matters of faith; it has sought higher ground,—has required and received satisfactory and even tangible proof; and the very strength of the faith it has thus imbibed, renders it the more cautious and discriminating as to the grounds on which it always renders its belief.

There is, indeed, another testimony—to believers more convincing. Their faith receives its seal from their daily experience of the suitability of Christianity to their wants, from their knowledge of its results; and, above all, from the witness they possess within themselves—the impression wrought upon their own hearts of its truth, and of a personal interest in its promises. But this secret assurance, precious as it is to those who possess it, is not that on which faith is *primarily* founded; neither is it that on which *alone* faith, at any time, rests; neither is it that on which an appeal is chiefly made to such as are still unbelieving and in doubt. Valuable as it is, it is as the talisman—esteemed only by those who know its charm—that is kept concealed in the bosom; whereas the external proofs, arranged in lucid order, are as a string of gems, open to the eye of all, the beauty and brilliancy of which all may admire, and of the faultlessness of which all are invited to judge.

It must, then, surely be admitted, that the evidences of Christianity are a study not to be neglected, but, on the contrary, one that is especially important to young women in the early developement of their minds. Instead of being put off from inquiries, which may at that time suggest themselves, as to the grounds of their faith, they should rather be encouraged in them; encouraged to examine and understand, both for their present satisfaction and their future shield, in order to strengthen their belief and guard them against error. Faith, as the Christian knows, is the exclusive work and gift of the Holy Spirit: still it is to evidences that the Spirit appeals; it is by the relation of signs and wonders, as it once was by the signs and wonders themselves, that the Spirit brings conviction to the heart; and on these, together with the internal testimony, she grounds the divine authenticity of the revelation. And when faith is thus established; when it is a matter of conviction, the result of scrutiny, and sealed by an individual appropriation of its privileges, it is indeed a fortress to which the enemy has not access, equally proof against the open assaults of scepticism, and the subtle underminings of heresy.

The great object in view, in thus informing the mind is, as we have observed, the establishment of the authority of Scripture. All religious error must arise from either a want of deference to the Bible, or an ignorance or misinterpretation of it. The first of these causes is, perhaps, the most prolific of false opinions; and it often involves the other two. For, where there is a want of reverence for the authority of Scripture, the natural results are indifference to its contents, and an accommodation of these to our own fancy. Whereas, when the Bible is regarded as the oracle of God, its enunciations are sought out with the deepest interest, and are received in their plain, unvarnished meaning, as the infallible revelation of his will.

To a want, then, of this deep reverence for Scripture—to this practical unbelief—may be ascribed the ignorance which we meet with on the subject of religion, and the error which is its offspring. In spite of the generally increasing interest on religious subjects, and the excitement which sometimes prevails, it is yet to be feared that a sound knowledge of the doctrinal truths of Christianity is by no means common. With regard, for instance, to the great key-stone of the Christian system, the doctrine of the Triune existence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, — involving the distinct personality and offices of the Eternal Three—though so strongly accredited in the formularies of the Church to which most of us belong; though imbibed, one would think, with our mother's milk; are there not many, who are regarded as even well instructed in religion, who know little of it except its name,—who are aware neither of the truths it implies, nor of the grounds on which it rests? They regard it as a dry dogma, which they are bound, indeed, to confess, but of which they have no satisfactory apprehensions, and about which they feel but little interest. They are not aware how entirely the scheme of salvation, in which they profess to hope, is grounded upon it; nor what practical mischief a slight deviation from the right faith induces. They do not appreciate the perfect harmony of the Christian system; they do not know how necessary every seemingly slight particular is to its completeness; they do not see how beautifully each doctrine unites with the whole, and proceeds from, or involves some important principle.

From such vagueness of belief may result inconsistency, want of discrimination, proneness to receive erroneous views, credulity. The enemies of truth are not slow to avail themselves of any entrance afforded them. By suppressing a few obnoxious tenets,—at which persons, even moderately instructed in the essential truths of Christianity, would at once take fright,—and exhibiting only what appears fair and liberal, they insinuate themselves into confidence, and may obtain for their unsound theology the approbation of many who profess a better creed. They gain footing, not by opposing truth, but by keeping it out of sight; and, avoiding all controverted ground, seek only to recommend their system by whatever is moral, and decorous, and highly esteemed amongst men. Thus they obtain credit for a high tone of virtue; and their systematic omission of the doctrines of the Gospel is a far more adroit means of undermining them than attack,—for this would at once arouse to a sense of the importance of the points in question, and place those, who *professed* to receive them, on their guard. It is thus that Arianism and Socinianism have not unfrequently made their way; and that low and even heretical views as to the distinctive doctrines of Christianity are often, almost unknowingly, entertained. There is a specious humility, no less than a pretended liberality, that obtains credit with many, who are not unwilling to spare themselves trouble, and avoid offence. "Who," it is argued, "can define inscrutable mysteries? Who can settle points which are past human comprehension? Are the subtle distinctions of theology essential to salvation; or is it not enough to practise virtue, without solving problems which perplex the most learned?" Even where these sentiments are not expressed, they are often virtually acted on; and an indifference to the mysteries of Christianity, an approbation of such religious works or teachers as give them no pre-eminence, shows that the essence of the Gospel has been lost, and that the leaven of Socinianism has already begun to work, and is exercising its baleful influence on the mind.

Religion may thus be reduced to a mere name. And of those, whose principles are thus vague and undeterminate, it may, with truth, be said, that they neither believe what they profess, nor know what they believe; but are ready to entertain every teacher who addresses them with eloquence, and in plausible and smooth phraseology. They are, therefore, without much difficulty, persuaded to give up truths which they never rightly valued, and to become the disciples of a school, whose system it is to discard every unpalatable tenet and every mysterious doctrine.

These remarks apply, in their full extent at least, only to persons who are careless of religion, or who do not regard it as a matter of paramount interest. But if, even amongst religious persons, there is, as has been remarked, sometimes a deficiency in the course of female education, in laying the foundation of faith, should we not the more carefully examine our own practice in the exposition of elementary principles, and ask ourselves whether we have placed these before our young pupils as a subject of personal and individual inquiry?

If we look at the result, — if we consider the state of religious knowledge prevalent amongst many women, — we shall find the more cause to make this inquiry. For we shall mistrust, in some cases, their ability to give an account of their own creed, or to detect heresy; their acquaintance with the grounds on which the doctrines of the Gospel rest; and their power, from want of exercise, even to understand and follow the apostolic arguments which establish them.

It may, indeed, justly be suspected that, if the importance of an accurate knowledge of Christian truth had been adequately felt, the errors which have recently seduced some of the young and tender members of the flock would scarcely have found so ready an entrance. Had the doctrine of salvation been rightly understood, and the imputation of the guilt of Adam and of the righteousness of Christ been *scripturally* explained, as by comparing John, iii. 36., with Romans, v. 19, &c., the semi-pelagian tenet of universal pardon, of which of late we have heard so much, would at once have been rejected as an opinion incongruous with the Christian system, and involving dangerous and heretical consequences. And again,—had the certainty of the divine counsels been established as an essential principle of Deity, and been considered, especially in application to the fulfilment of the purpose which, in reference to the human race, may be said (with reverence) to have taken the lead in the Eternal mind,—the tenet of the fallibility, still more of the sinful humanity, of the Son of God, and the consequent possibility of failure in the great plan of Omnipotence,—far from being listened to as a proposition worthy of entertainment,—would at once have been rejected as a blasphemous speculation, that impugned the very essence and attributes of God. Let it not be said that these subjects are too deep for our young female pupils; that they involve abstruse and metaphysical inquiries; and that it is not for us to perplex the mind, in its tender state, with questions requiring the highest powers of reason to understand and solve. It is not to invite to theologic disputation,—but to ward off from it,—that we would endeavour, in early life, to lay the groundwork of Christian faith, — that we would, without evasion or dilution of any scriptural doctrine, expound the great mystery of godliness, — that we would build, stone by stone, the perfectly compacted edifice, and show that, from the great Base on which it rests, to its polished capitals, there is not one single block that will bear displacing, one particle, the absence of which would not impair the unity and beauty of the entire temple.

Nothing is better calculated to divert from impertinent and unprofitable speculations than leading the mind to the study of what is really essential. It may be sometimes a fault in young persons, who are interested in religious subjects, to bestow their attention on inquiries which tend to but little practical improvement, and rather engender party feeling and exclusiveness. Some, whose theological knowledge is superficial, who, even in such articles as that of justification, or the origin and accomplishment of individual salvation, have much to learn, are yet more prone to diverge into extraneous questions, than to labour to attain a solid and scriptural acquaintance with primary doctrines. They are more eager, perhaps, to speculate on the events of the future personal Advent of Messiah, to conjecture its epoch, duration, and details, than to be instructed in the revelation he has already made; and they listen with more anxious anxiety to a vision, or prophecy of apocryphal authority, and doubtful import, than to a plain and practical exposition of a saving truth.

With a view, then, to divert from such curiosity, and to satisfy the mind upon what is most essential, the importance of an early and complete system of religious instruction upon all the vital mysteries of faith will be admitted. The appetite for strange views chiefly arises from the ignorance of those real treasures which have something better than novelty to recommend them, and of which nothing but an intimate knowledge can teach us the full value. Let the young female inquirer, who is disposed to listen to all that pretends to originality, apply to the experienced Christian; let her ask of one who, with prayer and humility, has sought the pure fountain of the Divine Word, whether there is not in the old ways and paths enough to interest and satisfy the soul that thirsts only for vital truth, — whether each day's study of doctrines, which have ever been received as the essentials of Christian verity, does not bring to light more of their perfection; does not confirm their applicability to individual want; does not disclose so rich and inexhaustible a vein of spiritual treasure, that, to those who have dug into it, the glitter of ephemeral theories and novel opinions offers no allurement.

To the attainment of religious knowledge the means are simple, and easy of access. The mistake often lies in neglecting these, and substituting others more difficult. A young inquirer is perplexed by the multitude of treatises she is recommended to consult; and, studying these rather than Scripture, — or, at least, relying on them for an explanation of Scripture, — she not unfrequently loses sight of the truth she is pursuing. Perhaps no opinions are so likely to be correct as those which are received on the first calm, serious, and unbiassed reading of the Bible. We might almost say, that the less that is *then* known of human commentary the better. Let the *first* impression be received from immediate contact with the Inspired Word; and the youthful student be encouraged to seek in the Bible itself, an explanation of its own difficulties, and to divest herself of opinions which have not been derived from the same infallible source. Not that a disposition to disparage wholesome guides should be admitted. If it is an error to rely too much on human helps, it is an equal one to depreciate them. Sometimes a profession of looking simply to the Bible is only a cloak for setting authority aside, and exclusively adhering to our own opinions. Such a spirit is the reverse of the teachable temper which really looks for, and finds, improvement in the perusal of the Scriptures. Whilst we do not burden ourselves with cumbrous aids,—whilst we are especially careful to seek our assistance only from the pious and the wise,—we should still endeavour to benefit by the labours of such as have explored and elucidated the sacred field.

But those who promise the most largely are not always the safest teachers. The attempts to systematise Christianity, and to solve its paradoxes, have not unfrequently confused rather than simplified; and shifted the knot instead of unloosing it. And, indeed, it is only reasonable that we should be somewhat suspicious of schemes which profess to remove all difficulties, and to render quite easy what has hitherto been deemed mysterious.

The spirit of truth, from the beginning, has rested with the believing Church; and though Christians may differ as to the precise division of their body, where it has been the least vexed by error and opposed by corruption, they doubt not that it has ever fulfilled its office to enlighten and to guide the saints of God. Can we, then, give credit to hypotheses which presuppose a want of knowledge in *all* who have gone before, and assert, that to a few instructors of this late century has been vouchsafed the first and only ray of pure illumination? Can we thus join in this sweeping censure of preceding ages, and magnify some gifted modern teachers at the expense of those who have been venerated as lights in the Church?

The Protestant, at the period of the Reformation, in spite of the darkness with which the external Church was enveloped, could discern the lamp of truth burning in the inner sanctuary, and trace amongst the faithful remnant the line of scriptural doctrine which he was taunted with as being new. But it is not so with recent innovators. Their merit lies in proposing tenets which have no precedent, and in striking out interpretations which no previous commentator has suggested. Or, if to some of their extreme opinions antiquity furnishes any prototype, it may be found in some exploded heresy, of which the name and phases are alike forgotten.

An early acquaintance with Scripture tends to produce humility and caution. It is not those who best know the Inspired Volume who think least of its difficulties; but those who take a partial survey, and build their theology on a few isolated texts. On this account, the study of the Bible itself should especially be urged upon the young of our own sex. We know that the faults imputed to women are a credulous ear, temerity in judgment, and a confidence too inconsiderate and implicit. They should, therefore, be prepared to exercise discrimination by an intimate acquaintance with the fountain of truth. They should know the Bible thoroughly and wholly, — not in compilations or extracts merely: — they should take it as their text book, —by which they are to try their creed, —and from the decision of which they are to admit of no appeal.

It is of importance, also, to establish the consistency of Scripture with itself. For this reason, it should be read consecutively and comparatively, and each part considered in its bearing to the whole. One epistle must not be kept back, because it may seem abstruse; nor undue prominence be given to another portion of Scripture, because it may accord with our own peculiar view. The seal is set to the completeness of the volume of inspiration in the concluding verses of the last book; and the agreement and adjustment of its parts are essential to its perfection and harmony. Let it be our care not to disturb its balance, nor to dilute nor exaggerate any of its statements.

The daily reading of the Scriptures is, of course, observed in all religious families. Frequently it is thought a necessary part of school-room routine, even where vital Christianity is little understood; and blessed effects may result from the habit, though it may have been only formally observed. The young people of a household may have drawn, from lessons thus prescribed, instruction which may have awakened them to the deficiencies of their own conduct, and the inconsistencies of their own creed.

Those, however, who have more than the form of godliness, and who are therefore in earnest in the religious instruction of their children, will be anxious to make their sacred studies not merely a matter of business, but interesting and delightful.

They will, therefore, second the first propensity for serious inquiry, and satisfy the first longing for divine knowledge by an affectionate unfolding of scriptural truth, — establishing, in the first place, the authority of the Bible, and then deducing, from it alone, the system of Christian doctrine and conduct.

And such mothers as are capable of thus guiding and enlightening their children will assuredly take this branch of instruction under their special care. They may commit other subjects of tuition to governesses and teachers; they may want leisure or even ability to conduct these to their satisfaction; but they will reserve to themselves, to their own judgment and tenderness, the hallowed office of unfolding the Bible to their children. At least, whatever assistance they may receive from others in this the most important science, they will themselves be the chief instructors. It is to them that their little ones will bring their Bibles; to them, that they will put the questions which, on these subjects, occur to their young minds; from them, that they will be fed with the sincere milk of the Word, and will imbibe that taste for scriptural instruction which, with the blessing of God, may lead to the real knowledge of divine truth.

Religious knowledge, we must remember, differs in this respect from every other,—that an influence independent of our own efforts is indispensable to its attainment. The inspiration which dictated the truths of Scripture must discover and apply them individually, to render us capable of understanding and receiving them. But where the seed is sown, the dew from heaven will not be wanting. Even though it may lie dormant for a time, it will revive and fructify; and the sheaves shall return into the maternal bosom, and yield a golden harvest to her who first sowed in faith. The prayers of a Christian mother are laid up in censers before the throne of the Eternal, and, as a perpetual and grateful incense, are accepted by Him to whom parental affection is no strange sentiment. He will not withhold the blessing: and the young woman who, in childhood, was taught by her earliest instructors to love her Bible, and, in adolescence, was encouraged to seek in its sacred pages a satisfaction to her spirit and a solution of her doubts, will, it may be confidently hoped, receive in its perusal that illumination which will enlighten its mysteries, and apply its life-giving doctrines to her eternal salvation. She will become a partaker of the heavenly gift — the earnest of fuller manifestations, and the dawn and promise of perfect day.

And if, in the present aspect of the Christian world, we see much to apprehend as well as to hope; if, while, on the one hand, we hail the increase of Gospel light, on the other we lament the growth of heresy; if, although in some cases the form of godliness has yielded to its power, in others the semblance even has disappeared, and unbelief is unblushingly professed; if, in short, there is every where a conflict between error and truth, and the struggle seems hastening to its crisis, is not this the time to arm our children with the sword of the Spirit, and to prepare them by lessons of heavenly wisdom for the conflict they may encounter?

We may remember, too, that as women are by no means exempt from the danger, so they are not from the obligation to guard against it. The weaker sex are, indeed, peculiarly liable to attack. They are regarded as tempting subjects by all who are eager for proselytes. The propounder of novelties counts on their susceptibility; the mystic on their enthusiasm; the infidel on their lack of knowledge; and all on their propensity to change. Is it not, then, our duty to place on them a double guard, and thus to disappoint those who calculate on their weakness?

CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTIANITY — DOCTRINAL.

The belief that religion involves mysteries, — lying sometimes under the type of outward symbol, — the discerning of which belongs to the enlightened worshipper, has been almost univerally entertained. There is a general impression that, beyond the reach of human knowledge, are secrets which, when revealed, would explain phenomena for which we can render no account, and would satisfy our minds on points of momentous and perplexing interest.

This conviction is strengthened by habits of reflection. It is when we exercise *thought*, that we find ourselves, on every subject, stopped by mystery. Those who are heedless, unobservant passengers, who take no note of things but as they subserve their own use, may occupy a place in a world of wonders, unconscious of marvels with which they are familiar, and unsolicitous for their explanation. And this is the case with too many who are travellers on the journey of life.

But if we are of a different cast, if we stop to think on what passes before or within us, we shall find ourselves every where met by what is to us inexplicable. Objects of sense have their mystery. The recondite secrets of nature exercise and perplex the curious inquirer; and every attempt to unravel them is arrested at a point where human speculation fails.

But much more unfathomable is the mystery which invests all that has reference to our spiritual condition. There is not a point in our moral constitution, an act of our will, a faculty of our mind, that does not involve questions which we cannot solve, and point at secrets which are hid in the Divine counsels. And if we look at the mazes in which human reason has been bewildered, at the conflicting sentiments of those who, unassisted by superior guidance, have endeavoured to discover truth, we shall be confirmed in the impression, both that spiritual knowledge must contain principles beyond the limit of our understanding, and that, without an express revelation, we could not even have ascertained their existence.

Every reflecting mind will expect to find in religion mysteries more transcendent than in any other science. Such a mind will even doubt the authenticity of any system, purporting to originate in Divine wisdom, that does not contain such mysteries. For if, in the prosecution of every inquiry, we are accustomed to turn back at a certain point, with the confession — here we know no more; beyond this we can render no account; this is the mystery of life — of vegetation — of magnetism or, again, to go a step higher, — this is instinct — or nerve — or muscular irritability; — if, in these ordinary subjects, we so soon get beyond our depth, and must have recourse to terms which express little more than our ignorance of the powers which they denote, must we not, in the highest science, — in a science relating to things invisible — to Him of whom we have no adequate conceptions, — conclude that its truths are the secrets of the mind of God; and that, as such, they infinitely pass our knowledge, and can only, in any degree, be revealed by the express manifestation of the Divine Spirit?

Under these impressions, we shall not be disposed to adopt any theological system, of which the apparent object is, to despoil religion of its mysterious articles of creed. We shall not be disposed to reduce faith to an historical belief in a specific fact, nor to think that a preceptive code comprises the whole of religious ethics. We shall not entertain opinions merely because they accommodate themselves to our apprehensions; and, by evading difficulties, appear to overcome them. But we shall be prepared to meet with much that is mysterious and paradoxical — *beyond* reason, though not contrary to it — in any authentic manifestation of Divine truth. If in earthly things there is so much that is unsearchable, what must we not expect when we hear of heavenly things?

Religion is the mystery of mysteries. It furnishes a solution of many subordinate difficulties; and, by its sublime truths, much that is otherwise dark and perplexing may be accounted for, though not explained. The pious naturalist — unable, as he is, to reduce to elemental particles many of those compounds whose properties are known to him, or to tell the nature of those subtle powers on whose operations he can calculate with mathematical precision — finds, in the belief of Deity, in the reference of the manifold processes of nature to His creating and sustaining hand, a satisfactory apology to his own mind for all that surpasses his intelligence. He feels as those who are ignorant of machinery do in looking at a complex engine. They observe its motion, — they admire its capability, — they calculate on its exactness, — they trust to its operation. Though they can give no explanation of its internal processes, they can satisfactorily account for their result: they are the work of a master hand.

This is, of course, the solution of all natural mysteries. When our finite understanding can trace no further the links in the chain, we pass to the First Great Cause. There is the intelligence that sees what to us is obscure, — that creates and combines the individual particles, and originates the laws of their motion and affinity. There are agencies which we cannot see, — springs too subtle for us even to comprehend; but, even though we cannot follow their workings, we possess the clue which leads us to their Author.

The same reasoning applies to spiritual science. Religion, the revelation from God, is the only guide to the intricacies of moral phenomena. It accounts for these, not by removing their difficulties, but by resolving them into its own transcendent truths. We can no more expect that the manifestation of God, in his character and government, as relates to our spiritual being, should explain the perplexities of our moral constitution, than that the knowledge of him as Creator and Sustainer of the natural world should unfold all the processes of the material universe. Our reason is as little capable of judging of the one, as understanding is of discerning the other. In both we admire the results; and from these we learn the perfection of their author. And in so far as we can comprehend the counsels of God, or trace the operations of his hand, we see revealed his wisdom and his goodness; but, when his ways are unsearchable, the darkness rests with us. Our organ cannot reach the heaven of heavens, nor read the Divine mind.

We are justified, therefore, in the belief that theology, as revealed, must contain much that is mysterious. We must expect, also, that it will *not* solve many of the perplexities of our moral nature, otherwise than by a reference to the Divine will. And we shall, therefore, be prepared to submit our reason to an authenticated manifestation of God's procedure, and to regard what is transcendent in such a manifestation, not as an invalidation of it, but an internal corroboration of its truth.

It is with these impressions that we should prosecute an inquiry, the most momentous of any that can occupy the mind. It is in this spirit — the spirit of self-distrust, and of submission to Divine teaching — that, having been convinced of the authority of the word of God, we should seek in it the knowledge that is above all price. And then we shall not start back when we find that God, as revealed in Scripture, is not the God of our imagination; and that his dealings have no exemplar in the transactions of men.

Such a frame of mind is an essential preparation to the study of Divine truth, and disposes us to take refuge at once in the only safe asylum,—namely, the revelation which God has made. And it should be our careful endeavour to lead the young mind thus to acquiesce in Divine mysteries, and to seek its rest in the assured message from on high.

It has already been remarked, that a spirit of inquiry characterises youth. We may also observe that, in many cases, the same period is marked by solicitude with reference to personal religion. It would seem as if this were often the time of the first effusion of the Spirit upon the heart. And, doubtless, as, in the Divine economy, outward circumstances are often made subservient to individual conversions by the frame of mind which they induce, it may be expected that, amongst the seasons propitious to the reception of the heaven-born principle, the period of the dawn of reason and of the development of the affections, should be one of the most favourable. If, in childhood, the good seed has been sown and has taken root, in adolescence the plant puts forth the shoots which indicate its character. And where no such care has been bestowed, there is still a softening of the heart, a glow of tenderness, and, in minds of a reflective cast, a disposition to serious thought, which often originate a solicitude on subjects of a spiritual nature.

In such cases the first anxiety that presses upon the mind arises from the sight of evil, and the sense of sin. The first induces perplexity; the second apprehension. Suppose the heart, were it possible, free from taint,—rather suppose it unawakened to the consciousness of guilt,—admiring virtue in its loveliness, and unsullied by actual crime. This is what the world calls the innocence of youth. Without adverting to the impropriety of the term, consider the effect produced on such a mind by the mere sight of evil. Let a young woman, thus unsophisticated, thus pure, be led to reflect on the sin every where around her,—on the dark page which history unfolds,—on the wickedness with which she is herself often brought in contact,—on the cruelty connected even with the supply of daily want, — must she not ask, from whence is the mischief? In a world so fair, that it speaks its Divine original, how comes the blemish? The infant form of beauty, smiling in its radiant joy and love, seems the bright promise of a perfect being;—why is maturity so degenerate? Why—for the inquiry must proceed so far—is evil so connected with present enjoyment, that the worst crimes are only the consequence, if we trace the gradation, of an indulgence in earthly pleasure?

The mind, thus reasoning, becomes absorbed in sad and painful doubt. But the doubt assumes a more personal interest, when the inquiry turns inward, and conscience intimates that whilst there is so much evil without, all is not right within. In spite of the flattering voice of human commendation, — the soothing unction of self-esteem,—there is a secret misgiving, a suspicion that the root of bitterness, prolific in so much evil, has its place in the heart, and has already germinated in a soil congenial to its growth.

There are, in short, a consciousness of sin, and an apprehension grounded upon it,—an apprehension vague and undefined at first,— but which, if not lulled by the opiate of flattery, resolves itself into a fear of the Divine Being, —of whom our first conception is—that he is the perfection of holiness.

Before the mind resorts to Scripture, the law of conscience written on the heart becomes a condemning letter. The first conviction of sin may arise, not from the conscious transgression of a revealed precept, but from the feeling that the heart has swerved from the line of rectitude engraven on its fleshly tablets. For besides these immutable laws of right and wrong,—which, bound up in our very being, are the traces of the original godlike image impressed on the primæval pair,—there is a partial enlightenment of conscience, produced by the popular reception of gospel truth and recognition of Christian ethics.

It is this internal standard, imperfect though it be, which often acts as an elementary schoolmaster. It is a reproving witness; and its testimony creates dissatisfaction, doubt, and fear.

Thus, on the very threshold of spiritual inquiry, we are taught to desire revealed truth. We find ourselves lost in a labyrinth, and catch at the clue which is to guide us out of it. We are stumbling on the dark mountains; but the clouds that envelope us, hasten our steps towards the star of hope that glimmers in the distance. The sight of evil, for which we cannot account,—the sense of sin, for which we cannot atone,—lead the reflecting mind seriously to search the record in which is contained the counsel of God, and to seek the illumination which is to disclose its saving doctrines. And the heart that is really called by God will safely reach its home. It will come, broken it may be, to the fountain of truth, and will recover soundness from its healing waters.

The doctrines of Christianity are all sanative. They are, therefore, not sought out till they are felt to be needful; nor are they applied in their full efficacy, until the urgency of the case is ascertained. Thus a sense of sin prepares for the reception of the saving mystery of the Gospel,—that all important article of the Christian creed, on which every other of its truths is based.

A full acceptance of the Doctrine of Atonement is essential to peace and Christian holiness.

Professedly every member of an orthodox church believes it. But it is not until its suitableness to individual need is felt, that it is understood and welcomed. It is then that the discovery of God made flesh, is as a light shining in a dark place; and that the rising of this sun of righteousness is hailed as the harbinger of health and joy.

The Scripture accounts for the prevalence of evil. It reveals the cause and the nature of the curse which darkens creation, and of the sinful principle which stirs within the heart. It propounds, as an article of faith, what experience is slow to learn,— the corruption of our nature, — the servitude even of the will. In one sense, indeed, the will is, and must be, free. It is always free to choose.—But the bias that influences the will is, by nature, to evil, not to good. Therefore the will, until its true liberty is restored, prefers evil, and incurs the guilt of its selection.

Thus the internal propensity to sin is transmitted together with the judicial guilt. The perverse nature of the first Adam is inherited, as also his sin is imputed. And though this transmission of guilt is mysterious: is the transmission of the penalty less so? Yet of this the death of every unconscious infant speaks the proof to our hearts. Nor have we a less convincing or less affecting evidence of our inheritance of sin. Whence the alienation of the heart from God? Whence our dislike to spiritual service,—our absorption in earthly pursuits,—our longing, even in childhood, after forbidden pleasures. "I cannot pray but I sin; nay, I cannot hear a sermon but I sin; I cannot give an alms or receive the sacrament but I sin; nay, I cannot so much as confess my sins, but my very confessions are still aggravations of them: my repentance needs to be repented of, my tears want washing, and the very washing of my tears needs still to be washed over again in the blood of my Redeemer. Thus not only the worst of my sins, but even the best of my duties, speak me a child of Adam; insomuch that whensoever I reflect upon my past actions, methinks I cannot but look upon my whole life to be but as one continued act of sin."*

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* Beveridge's Private Thoughts, Article IV.

For a disease, so inveterate, Omnipotence only can provide a cure; and it is the conviction of this that prepares us for the stupendous intervention of the Son of God.

The application of the remedy is equivalent and analogous to the transmission of the disease. The sin of the first Adam is even more than counterpoised by the righteousness of the second. In the transactions of both representatives, there is a double process; — a transfer of sin from the guilty to the innocent; and of righteousness, from Him who alone is righteous, to the inheritors of guilt, and the actual transgressors of God's law. The more we contemplate this mystery, the more do we admire its stupendous grace. The satisfaction is sufficient: the righteousness perfect. Nothing less could save from the penalty, or entitle to the reward. We are like penniless bankrupts, to whom, when the old score is wiped off, there is no means of avoiding a new debt. But he who has undertaken for us, has not only cancelled the first claim, but has given us wherewithal to be, in future, solvent.

Into this mystery it is no wonder that angels should desire to look. And if they are the admiring spectators, how much more should we be? If, of the countless worlds which people space, God, in His sovereignty, has chosen this as the theatre for the exhibition of His highest love, is it not specially for us to adore His distinguishing mercy. Redemption has raised us in the scale of creatures. We hear that the universe teems with spheres unknown,—that the luminous path that girds the heavens is but a cluster of suns giving light, it may be, to individual systems;—that, were our world erased, its void would scarcely be perceived in the material immensity:—and, who that reflects on this, but must feel his nothingness,—must think that he is little more to be accounted of than the ephemeral insect; that he is an atom,—a speck,—and that all his concerns and interests are as the mote that plays in the sunbeam, or the dust that lights upon the balance. Yet it is not so. Deity has stooped to assume our form, and has been clothed with our suffering humanity. And why?—Because the immortal soul is above all price; because this ethereal spark—this emanation from the Divine Essence is worth more than myriads of material worlds,—or than the most perfect and majestic forms of animal existence.

It needs but the omnific word of Deity, and the empyrium is spangled with countless gems: — suns and planets know their place, and walk in the bounds that they dare not pass. "He made the stars also." But it cost more to redeem our souls. It cost more—and God is more glorified by his second work. It was a higher strain which the Bethlehem shepherds heard, than when the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God chanted in our natal day. What wonder that angels should sympathise* in each new fruit of this last glorious enterprise, and repeat their triumphant song, when every captive spirit finds release. And how rapturous will be their chorus, when they welcome in the world's regeneration, when the band of the chosen is complete, and with their ransomed brethren, they adore the consummated work of the incarnate God.

Atonement, once received, the Christian system opens, line by line. The Word of God contains the lesson, and His spirit is the preacher. The end of redemption is to annul the power of evil. The claim against us is cancelled, that the dominion of sin within us may be destroyed. The guilt is expiated, that the soul, at peace with God, may regain its paternal likeness.

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* Luke, xv. 10.

This is the work of the Divine Spirit: it is by His operation that the will is again made free. In its primæval state, the movements of the will were in accordance with those of the heaven-born spirit — they were the expression of the soul's breathings after perfect good. The desire, the will, the inclination, the action were all good. God looked on the work, and it was very good. Such was the law of liberty, in which our first parents walked blameless, obeying the motions of their own hearts, for the image of God was there,—and following their own will, for that will was identical with the will of God.

To this perfect law of liberty the children of God will be restored. In it they are even now initiated by the spirit of adoption. And it is this initiation that constitutes the renewal of their minds — a work begun when the first bias heavenward is given to the soul, and carried on in its progressive sanctification.

The indwelling of the Spirit in the heart is the evidence of a participation in the Saviour's merits. Those who are reconciled to God, are partakers of his best gifts. They are his children, born again in the laver of regeneration. Their affections are towards him; for he has infused in them the spirit of his love, which is as a germ of holiness leading them to Himself, warring against the corrupt principle within, and withstanding the seductions of evil from without.

The consciousness of such a sentiment, the belief that the soul is really athirst for God, whilst it encourages a humble and rejoicing hope, leads to the ascription of glory to Him to whom alone it is due. The inquiry suggests itself,— From whence is the principle that stirs within me;—the impulse that draws my soul to God? From whence are those desires after holiness which have arisen within my breast? They are not self-existent; they cannot be of spontaneous growth.

The aspirations of the renewed heart, do indeed, themselves indicate their original. They refer to their source. They come from God, and point to God. There is a consciousness within the breast of every child of heaven, that the spiritual breath he breathes is the gift of God. Did the Scripture not ascribe it to the fountain of eternal love, it would itself attest its source. I have nothing that I have not received, is the believer's witness. I could not have quickened my own soul. I could not have chosen Christ, if Christ had not first chosen me. I could not have come to Christ, if the Father had not drawn me. I could not have arisen from the valley of death, if the spirit had not breathed upon me; if the word of God had not said unto me,—Live; if the prescient mind of the Eternal Three had not, in their everlasting counsel, designed my salvation, and enrolled my name in the Book of Life. The individual purpose of mercy, hid in the secrets of the Divine breast, is read in the actual work of the Spirit on the heart. The return of the soul to God speaks its election to eternal life.

But it is not on special, but on general declarations of God's will and promises, that

Christians must rest. They trace back, indeed, to the rock from which they are hewn: they know that the stream which refreshes their souls must have had its rise in the everlasting hills;—but it is only as they find within them this holy well, and feel it to be effectual to the purifying of their souls, that they ascertain its identity with the river of life, which issues from the throne of God. "The doctrine of Election," says the Christian philosopher of our own day, "is in itself a necessary inference from an undeniable fact—necessary, at least, for all who hold that the best of men are what they are, through the grace of God. In relation to the believer it is a hope, which, if it spring out of Christian principles, be examined by the tests, and nourished by the means prescribed in Scripture, will become a lively, an assured hope, but which cannot in this life pass into knowledge, much less, certainty of foreknowledge." *

The life of the Christian can only be maintained from the same source whence it was first derived. As it did not generate itself, so

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* Coleridge's Aids to Reflection. Comment on aphorism second, on spiritual religion.

neither can it support itself. This, too, is confirmed by the internal witness. For, though we are told in the outset of our pilgrimage, that we must seek for a daily renewal of the spiritual gift: though it is analogous with the Divine procedure that we should continue dependent,—so that salvation, both in itself and in the means that lead to it, might be wholly gratuitous,—yet the conviction that it must be so is scarcely established but by actual experience. We must learn our insufficiency by our own failures.

In virtue, then, of our union with our spiritual head, the principle of vitality is nourished in the soul. Christ is the fountain: from Him the stream of life will be supplied; and, as long as it flows freely, the system is in health. And, therefore, union with Him is the source of strength and the ground of hope. We have had but slight experience in the Christian walk if we have not learnt our weakness; if we have not felt that, whatever may have been the power of evil within us, before we were conscious of its presence, the sense of indwelling sin in the renewed heart is even more humiliating.

For it is not merely that we fall under

occasional temptation, nor that we come short of acknowledged duty,—but, do not the consciences of Christians testify that the experience of every day is such as to make them blush? Is not the enemy still within the bosom, and his power so great, that they often faint in the conflict, and seem on the very verge of despair? Even whilst the heart is faithful to its allegiance, must they not avow that they are but too frequently overpowered in the outworks; and that nothing but the presence of their great Captain can save the citadel.

But His promise is, that He will be *there:* that He will dwell in them, and make His abode with them, and that the *hearts* of His people shall be the habitation and the temple of the triune God. And this is the mysterious union, of which the nearest human relationship is only an imperfect emblem. The tie of blood,— the parental bond,— the fraternal connexion,—the marriage identity—are inadequate symbols: and even when all employed,— when the collective names of father, brother, husband, intimate the closeness of the affinity, language and experience fall short of the truth; and the union of the Church with its Head remains unparalleled by any earthly prototype.

By the work of the Redeemer every want of the redeemed is anticipated and supplied. Does the frailty of our nature, the still pregnant germ of evil, involve us in continual sin? The sacrifice once offered is of perpetual efficacy. Is our deficiency so great, that no service of our own is worthy to be offered? The vicarious righteousness of the Saviour once effected, intercedes for us for ever, before the throne of God. In Christ we are justified.—"His righteousness covers our unrighteousness." His raiment without seam is the vesture of the church; and in it she appears—without spot or blemish—arrayed as a bride for her espousals.

To imagine that, for the appropriation of the blessings purchased for us by Christ, a personal claim must be established, is to counteract the gratuitousness of the gift. "If salvation be of grace, it is not of works,—otherwise grace is no more grace." And besides, we have nothing but poverty to recommend us, and out of poverty nothing can be bought. No;—we must come, as the typical Joshua—the representative of the church did,—to the mercy seat, with garments soiled and unwashed, in order to receive the change of raiment — the everlasting righteousness of the Great High Priest, which is "unto and upon all them that believe."*

Faith is the hand that takes the investiture; and thus we are said to be justified by faith. Yet faith is the instrument, not the cause, of justification. It *originates* in a higher source. Nor can the hand itself be stretched out until the power of extension is imparted. As the man with the withered arm could not have put it forth, until muscular energy had been restored, and the nervous irritation of the member had given symptom of returning life,—so neither can the spiritual arm be extended, until vitality is infused;—and then the effort and the cure are simultaneous.

It is the reference of salvation to its source which constitutes the Christian's security. The love of God knows no change. And therefore its earliest manifestation is a pledge of its endurance. We read of the Redeemer, "that having loved His own, He loved them unto the end:" and in this trait we recognise the character of Deity. Human affection often fails, — human tenderness varies, — but God's love is unchangeable. And on this assurance the believer rests. Can I trace the stream of life to its source, and not follow it to the ocean? Yet thither it must flow, and there discharge its accumulated waters.

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* Zechariah, iii. 3, 4.

And this conviction sets the seal to Christian peace. But it can be an individual consolation, only when the *tokens* of God's love are found within. The chain must be complete. If two links of it,—the first and last, as Archbishop Leighton says,—are "up in heaven, in God's own hand, the middle one is let down to us;" and by this only, which is visible, can we ascertain the others. And thus we can understand the exhortation, and its motive,—to "make our calling and election sure,"—because, "it is God that worketh in us."

Nothing short of an assured hope can stay the soul in the trials of life, or appease the solicitudes of a troubled breast. Are we young, in health, and in prosperity? — Hope, possibly, may be strong within us; — our pulse may beat high with the promise and prospect of pleasure or success: — but what do we anticipate? Shall we forget the casualties of which we have daily warnings? — shall we suppose our dreams realised, our fondest visions achieved, — and honour, fame, or, at least, domestic happiness waiting upon our steps — casting a halo round our path, and filling our hearts with gladness?

Still — where is our security? What if we knew that all this bliss would attend us to the tomb, we must then be deprived of it. And if maturity has already taught us the swift advance of years, — if it has shed its sobered tint upon the future; if it has made us familiar with the features of death, and, in the dissolution of others, has given us a presage of our own, — do not these symptoms of decay embitter the enjoyment of all earthly good? Are there not moments when we start back even from our dearest blessings, — when the very preciousness of an object makes us tremble; — when the happy laugh of a darling child, or the fond embrace of a friend excites a pang of apprehension; — when, in the midst of wishes realised, hopes accomplished, of gaiety — wealth — love, — there comes a blast over the soul, — a withering foreboding, which no human precaution can prevent, nor earthly joy allay?

It cannot but be our desire, if we reflect at all on the precariousness of present things, to establish ourselves on some securer footing. And, if we are mothers, it must surely be our most earnest wish, that our children should realise the end of their existence, and be permanently happy. To teach them, however, the way to be so, we must be ourselves instructed: our own minds must be established in the truth. We must know the way of peace by our own experience, if we would show it to those who are to follow our steps.

An experimental and practical acquaintance with religion is, in truth, essential to female excellence. It is indispensable to the well-being of the sex, and to the discharge of their most important duties. Without it, they are unsettled in a point which involves interests of the first magnitude, and to which nothing but an unreasonable folly and thoughtlessness can render them indifferent.

Still, it may be asked, can nothing, short of closing with mysteries so high, impart peace? Is there no moderated scheme, which can satisfy, without disquieting — which can instruct in duty, without perplexing with doctrine; and which, if it does not inspire confidence as to the future, at least encourages hope?

But is it a hope, vague and undefined, that can satisfy the inquirer after truth, or set to rest the gloomy forebodings of conscience, or cheer the afflicted spirit, in the hour of its bereavement? Assuredly not. It is the hope that is based upon the whole counsel of God, and confirmed by an internal witness, that can alone stand the shock of storms, such as frequent our atmosphere. It is this anchor, sure and steadfast, that entereth in within the veil; and which there, in the secret of the inner temple grasps the Rock of Ages, and rides secure on the foundation of Eternal Love. And *,— "blessed for ever and ever be that

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* Hooker's Sermon on Habakkuk, i. 4.

mother's child, whom faith hath made the child of God! The earth may shake, the pillars of the world may tremble under us, the countenance of the heaven may be appalled, the sun may lose his light, the moon her beauty, the stars their glory, — but concerning those that trust in God, if the fire have proclaimed itself unable to singe a hair of their heads, — what is there in this world that shall change their hearts, overthrow their faith, alter their affection towards God, or the affection of God to them? If I be of this note, who shall make a separation between me and my God? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No: I am persuaded, that neither tribulation, nor anguish, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword, nor death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall ever prevail so far over me. I know in whom I have believed; I am not ignorant whose precious blood has been shed for me; I have a

Shepherd full of kindness, full of care, and full of power: unto him I commit myself; his own finger hath engraven this sentence in the tablet of my heart, — 'Satan hath desired to winnow thee as wheat, but I have prayed that thy faith fail not:' therefore the assurance of my hope I will labour to keep as a jewel unto the end; and by labour, through the gracious mediation of His prayer, I shall keep it."

This confidence makes no approach to presumption; it has no tendency to render us otherwise than vigilant. For it can be in exercise no longer than it has pledges to appeal to; and of the existence of such pledges, watchfulness itself is the criterion. Our own sedulity is a proof of the Divine interest for us, because it is a fruit of Christ's intercession on our behalf.

Christian hope is a sanctifying principle, — for its object is the fruition of God. It is this, for which the renewed spirit longs. It is this, which constitutes its heaven. And it is this, which will surpass all that the most spiritual mind has conceived, or special manifestations of God made known. The beloved disciple, in the island of vision,—the apostle of the Gentiles, between earth and heaven, saw, even in their unutterable revelations, only an imperfect picture of the glory that is to come.

For we have promise of a brighter day than earth or heaven has yet disclosed. The dawn of the resurrection morn will penetrate the tombs of the saints, and unseal the eyes of those that sleep in Christ. Incarnation points, with a certain light, to the manifestation of the sons of God. Its closing mystery is — the redemption of the body. The tribes of the redeemed shall walk in their glorified forms, in the streets of the New Jerusalem, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

In this blessed assurance, Christians meet their last conflict. They undergo the penalty of the flesh,—but its sting is removed; they pass through the dark valley, — but the glory of the Celestial City shines beyond; they encounter their last enemy,—but it is to conquer and destroy.

> " Father! in Christ we live, and Christ in Thee —
> Eternal Thou, and everlasting we.

The heir of heaven, henceforth I fear not death:
In Christ I live! in Christ I draw the breath
Of the true life! . . . .
Is that a death-bed where a Christian lies?
Yes! but not his —'tis death itself there dies."*

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* Coleridge.

CHAPTER V.

CHRISTIANITY — PRACTICAL.

In all human sciences, we learn to distinguish between a theorist, and a man of practical wisdom. We find that it is not enough to reason upon abstract principles, — that results, however fairly they may seem to be deduced, are not always verified by experience; and that, either from some flaw in the chain, some imperfection in the moral or physical agents, some let and obstruction, for which calculation had not been made, the end is not what was looked for. The man of study, intent only upon diagrams, adjusts his calculations upon what he considers infallible data, — proportions in his own mind force to force, — draws the balance in his own favour, and, with all the enthusiasm of successful discovery, anticipates the achievement of his brilliant project. He sees, perhaps, in his mind's eye, the carriage of the railroad distanced, and the leviathan of the sea propelled without the cumbrous apparatus of steam. But the practised mechanic destroys the illusion, detects at once some counteracting power, and proves that the engine, however ingenious and elaborate, will not work.

In the same way, the political economist, deep in philosophy and statistics, expatiates in the sphere of his own imaginings — projects plans for the amelioration of society, and longs for power to put them in execution. But whilst he argues, it may be, from true principles, he forgets the subjects which these are to affect; whilst he reckons on the operation of certain propensities, he does not calculate on the opposite bias; and, therefore, experience too often proves the fallacy of his projects, and brings disappointment to his schemes.

But the Divine Architect of the Christian economy has provided against failure, and has adapted, in all respects, the means to the end. Not only is the machinery perfect in itself, but it is calculated for every variety of obstruction;

and when its motion is in any way retarded, there is still provided a fresh incentive to perpetuate the action.

The object of the Christian scheme is, the restoration of its disciples to their pristine likeness of their Creator. To effect this all its apparatus is subservient. Still, it is remarkable that, whilst its doctrines involve this as a consequence, the result is furthered by more direct appliances. Precept stimulates the convictions of the renewed heart,—the movements of sin are checked in their birth by the warnings of Scripture; and the detail of Christian ethics is explained, and insisted on, by express and positive command. And thus, whilst Christian faith of itself renovates the soul, and true morality can have no existence, except as springing from this, as a principle, still it is not solely by an exhibition of abstract doctrine that the character of the disciple is perfected. The Divine Teacher takes into account the subject to be influenced,—the hindrance to the full operation of the system, arising from the perverseness of the moral recipient,—and therefore provides additional aids to meet the exigence.

And these are no more to be neglected, than are the mainsprings of the machinery. They are essential to the progress and completion of the work, and bear the stamp of infinite wisdom.

In our own conduct,—in that connection which bears the closest resemblance to the relation of God to his creatures,—we adopt, if we are wise, a similar course. As parents, our first object is to inspire our children with a reverential affection towards ourselves. We know that, unless they love us, we cannot expect their obedience. And we, therefore, lay ourselves out to gain their love. We believe that it is of the utmost importance to engage not only their gratitude, but their esteem and friendship. But though we know that filial love must develope itself in acts pleasing to a parent, that affection, of itself, assimilates those who are united by its tie,—we should feel that we very imperfectly discharged our duty, if we left even *this* principle entirely to its own actings; if we did not require obedience by express command; if we did not instruct our children in the nature of our own wishes; if we did not positively, and in detail, intimate, that such things they were to do, and such to shun.

And if this be our own procedure, recommended at once by judgment and affection, we cannot but see the wisdom of a similar course, as pursued by the Highest Intelligence. Nor can we doubt but that it is our own duty to concur in the line thus marked out; and, in our exposition of the counsel of God,—both as it regards others and ourselves,—to keep strictly to the model set before us.

The Scriptures themselves afford a striking illustration of the principle in question. And the admission of this helps us to explain what, abstractedly, might appear paradoxical. Why, it might be asked, if the doctrines of the Gospel induce holiness as a consequence, should it be enforced as a command? Why, if they originate a character, should duties, the result of that character, be urged by special precept? Why—but for the same reason that parents, even though they do not question the affection of their children, inculcate the submission which is its fruit,—and explain, and exhort to the individual actions which are the natural expression of filial love.

Religious instruction, to be in any respect adequate, must proceed upon the same system. We are taught this by analogy, and taught it by the exemplar which Divine wisdom has furnished. The inspired writers are as jealous for purity of life as for purity of doctrine; and, however carefully they lay the foundation, they are no less precise in arranging the superstructure.

And, therefore, in communicating that knowledge, which of all others is most important, we should be on our guard not to fall short of the whole truth. And this caution has reference, not merely to inaccurate, but to *deficient* statements. That statement, for instance, is deficient, which, whilst it fairly expounds the doctrinal system of the Gospel, and even implies that holiness is the consequence of its reception, does not explain the nature of holiness,—state its principle—particularize its duties, and, in direct terms, insist upon its cultivation.

Antinomianism, properly so called, is of rare occurrence. That is, there are probably very few, who cast aside the obligations of morality, upon the assumption that they are obsolete and not binding upon Christians. The epithet of Antinomian is, by some, applied to the Gospel itself,—but all, who are really acquainted with Scriptural truth, know the fallacy of the charge.

Still, the practical tendency to antinomianism is deeply seated in the breast, and it shows itself in various ways. It has been the root of error, and of heresy. To find a substitute for holiness is a favourite project of the natural mind: hence the various observances of superstition, which ordinarily are nothing but expedients to avoid the spirituality of the Divine law.

The principles of the world are antinomian,—because they lower the standard of true morality, and substitute in religion an external for an internal service.

The principles of such as attribute to their own works a saving efficacy, are antinomian,—because they ascribe to imperfection what perfection alone can effect, and, under the cloak of zeal for the law of God, mitigate its requisitions.

Every one-sided view of truth itself, is antinomian. That, which, whilst it allows, in any degree veils, the doctrines of grace, is antinomian, because it obscures what alone can enlighten and sanctify the soul. And that which, unfolding the theory only, fails to enforce and specify its fruits, verges likewise to antinomianism.

So that, although the term is often unadvisedly applied, and, in its full meaning, perhaps, but seldom merited, antinomianism is no mere phantom. Like many other evil principles latent in the heart, it cannot bear the light of day — it cannot stand a full disclosure; it is not in its own likeness, but in one of its cognate forms, that it is ordinarily met with.

The propensity to antinomianism, as it originates in the innate inclination to sin, so is it co-existent with it. As long as the evil bias is in force, antinomianism, in one shape or other, is palatable.

On this account, it is necessary to be on our guard at every stage. In early instruction, it is not enough, as has before been said, to lay down a correct scheme, even if we infer its consequences. We must argue forward from the scheme to the consequences, and back again from the result to the system. If the tree is good, the fruit will be good. The converse likewise must be insisted on:—if the fruit is *not* good, neither is the tree.

Nor is this merely an elementary point,—it involves a warning never inapplicable. There is so much that is fascinating in the scheme of Christianity, that we may expatiate in it, without realising its end. We may know it intellectually; not only so,—we may taste and relish its mysteries—delight in exploring its unsearchable depths, in reading in these the counsels of the Most High, in tracing the adjustment of its several parts—their coherence—applicability—wisdom. And in this contemplation the religion of some persons seems to consist. Their individual practice, indeed, may not discredit their profession; but still they have little delight in practical views. They relish, only, the *deep* things of faith. They seek the exposition of transcendent doctrines—the unfolding of the secrets of heaven—the exhibition of the Divine purpose, as it respects God's chosen people; whilst of any more simple, and, as they may deem it, initiatory topic, they become weary. The mention of holiness, or of duty, chills them. Theology is to them a science — a study — an intellectual refreshment; but as an influential principle, it possesses little interest, — at least, as it respects the detail of conduct. Although they allow its practical bearing, they have little pleasure in hearing it so applied.

Such a state is assuredly not healthful. To a mind thus attuned the tone of Scripture is too low. Many portions, even of the Word of God, must seem to it insipid: and for not merely the elementary instruction, but for much that is addressed to churches, in all the vigour of their spiritual health, it has lost its relish.

Such a mind may, indeed, consider, that doctrinal truth is all-sufficient; and that exhortation is unnecessary where holiness is assured.

But this is surely being wise above what is written. It is setting aside the model of Scripture, and arguing from theory rather than from practical wisdom. Were the propensity to evil wholly eradicated; had the infused principle no obstacle to its full development and operation, it might be left to its spontaneous movements; but the perpetual check of indwelling corruption must be met and overcome by new and direct incentives.

And where these are neglected or despised, it is not surprising that the result is defective. The fruit will not be matured unless the culture is adequate.

It is not, however, in the prominent parts of Christian conduct, that the deficiency in such cases will probably appear. The mind, that has received the first principles of the Gospel, has within it a safeguard against flagrant offences. But there is considerable danger, lest the omission, or the depreciation, in any degree, of practical exhortation, may produce tempers not honourable to religious profession, and a carelessness in the ordinary conduct.

The faults, to which those who have received the doctrines of the Gospel are peculiarly exposed, may assume a form which reconciles and even recommends them to the religious professor. Sectarianism and exclusiveness, for instance, are tempers not congenial to Christianity; still they are the not unusual concomitants of extreme views. And why?—because they take the guise of attachment to Gospel doctrine,—of the adoption of a high standard, or, of an uncompromising avowal of unpopular truths.

These are the blemishes often charged upon Christians by people of the world; and it is matter of shame and regret that they cannot always be disowned. We must, it is to be feared, admit that they do sometimes disfigure the high professor; that, whilst the picture, sketched by an enemy, is overdrawn, its resemblance cannot wholly be denied: and thus that the faults which, in the eyes of irreligious persons, are occasion of prejudice and blame to many who feel themselves involved in the reproach, are a matter of deep grief, and, probably also, of personal annoyance.

For not only does the injury which attaches to religion, from the exhibition of these blemishes, give them pain, but they themselves often experience their effect. They have the full benefit of the narrow-mindedness, which confines the odour of sanctity to its peculiar sect; and of the unreasonableness, which, without respect to the claims or opinions of others, requires an exclusive regard to its own fancies, and an unqualified adoption of its own views.

Partial statements naturally lead to these results. Even the secret dissatisfaction they produce occasions impatience, if not jealousy. For we are apt to be intolerant of the slightest difference, when we are not quite sure of our own footing; and intemperance often originates from a disavowed suspicion that our own scheme is scarcely defensible.

Thus may many of those desightly blots which we have been lamenting, be accounted for. They are the symptoms and the results of a disproportionate and distorted view. And, while they have afforded grounds for reproach, they have paved the way for graver offences. They have been the presage of those swervings from sound doctrine, and departures from the ways of peace and holiness, which, from time to time, have tried the faith, and grieved the hearts of Christians, and have been a cause of scandal to the unbelieving and ungodly.

Such is the human heart, that whatever we are not reminded of we soon lose sight of. There is no surer way of undermining a doctrine than keeping it out of view; and it is therefore only natural that the consequence of the omission of practical exhortation should be an abatement in the moral standard. We cannot, indeed, calculate the extent of the mischief. We are never more in danger than when we despise danger; and, on the contrary, vigilance is a means and a pledge of our security. And where a partial view of the Gospel has led into doctrinal error, on the one side, or practical antinomianism, on the other; where it has terminated in a secession from the truth, or a re-adoption of worldly principles and courses; we may trace the progress step by step, and feel that the result is only a realisation of what the earliest symptoms might have led us to anticipate.

A distorted exposition of the Gospel system has also a tendency to unsettle the mind. It may be, in some cases, doubtful whether instability is the cause or the effect; but, whilst we admit that an inconstant temper is disposed to tire of the beaten track, and to evince caprice, as well with respect to opinions as to persons, we must also allow that nothing is more calculated to induce wavering than the adoption of any perverted view. It throws us off our balance; and it is then a chance to which side we lean.

There have not been wanting exemplifications of this result. Persons who, from the preponderance they have attached to certain tenets, have been on the very verge of error on one side, have, under a new influence, been exposed to equal hazard in a contrary direction; or the foundation of their faith has been so shaken, that they have lost ground altogether. Thus we have seen secessions and schisms, which, for a time, have prevailed and distracted the peace of the Church, terminate in one or other of these results. Some, who have been led to diverge from the path of safety, may have retraced their steps; and, though they have been in slippery places, may have regained their footing on the rock, — and may appear to stand more firmly from having trod a perilous path: but some, on the contrary, have been so tossed about by every unstable wind, that, at last, they have sought a false anchorage in the comprehensive haven of unbelief. And not a few have verified the maxim, that extremes meet,—and have been forward to adopt notions the very opposite of their former creed, — with which, perhaps, the only thing in common is the allurement of novelty.

It is an indication of spiritual health when practical instruction is palatable. If we are really striving to attain proficiency in Christian graces, we shall not be unwilling to hear them recommended and enforced. But when we shrink from all such exhortation; when the exposition of duty is irksome to us; when nothing but doctrinal speculations (and these of an exclusive and exciting nature) suit our taste, —there is reason to apprehend that the searching scrutiny of a practical appeal is not agreeable, because it may occasionally wound the conscience, and, in some measure, disturb our self-complacent repose.

Women, from the quality and training of

their minds, are in greater danger than the other sex of adopting superficial views. They may be deficient in the intellectual comprehensiveness which embraces a *whole* subject, considers it in all its bearings, and thus obtains a correct notion of its points and of their individual and relative value: and therefore they have furnished too frequent examples of aberrations from sound doctrine, and been prone to errors which have arisen from partial statements.

But a distinct perception of truth is a preservation both against speculative delusion, and practical deficiency. Those who are grounded in the principles of their faith find in these solid satisfaction, and are not easily persuaded to relinquish them for more tempting theories. They also feel them to be constraining motives to moral improvement.

Christian holiness cannot exist without Christian faith. It has no name, no being, but as coexistent with the belief of spiritual truth. It cannot be identified with any outward signs, although it is expressed by them; for it is a frame, a constitution, a temper, — but not any single *act*.

It is, in short, a principle, — and nothing more than a modification of the principle of love to God; — for it is the assimilation of the soul to God, — and this is involved in the love of Him.

Moral precepts, therefore, are not the whole of Christian ethics. The inculcation of them, without reference to evangelical motive, is not the inculcation of Christian holiness. In the same way that a suasion to individual acts of charity is not a suasion to the principle of benevolence, and that the performance of these does not necessarily imply the existence of benevolence, — so an exhortation to special duties does not comprise the practical instruction, nor the observance of them the evangelical holiness, of the believer.

It is of much importance to observe this distinction: for, however essential is the particularising of duties — however indispensable their fulfilment, as the indication and embodying of the internal principle, — they are only the symbol of its existence, and one efficient means of its maintenance. In the latter sense, indeed, they are remarkably available. Nothing is more conducive to growth in *spiritual* conformity to the Divine will than a conformity of conduct. The benevolent, as they abound in works of charity, add to the stock of their own benevolence; — their hearts enlarge as their hands give; and the more they labour for others, the more do they overflow with love to them, and the more intense are their desires to do them good. And thus it is in Christian attainment. The more pains-taking the obedience, the more ardent will be the longings after that entire assimilation to his Divine Exemplar which shall be perfected in His immediate presence.

In like manner, as we infer the existence of benevolence from benevolent actions, so we may fairly infer that Christian principle is in exercise from Christian conduct. The latter is intimately connected with the former; and, in some cases, has seemed even to orginate it. It has, in these instances, appeared to have a reflex action: and at least has been the channel through which the principle has been infused, which alone can give to outward deportment consistency and worth.

It is, however, by considering holiness as an internal sentiment that we are to see its obligations and understand its influence. Do this, and live, is an arbitrary command,—it is the primeval covenant; — it is, — however modified, — salvation of merit, not of grace. But view holiness as an assimilation of heart to God, and thus as the end and essence of salvation, and its necessity and connexion with the Christian scheme are at once apparent. It is the immediate fruit of love to God, — the indispensable qualification for His presence. It is, in short, an incipient heaven.

The love that is first diffused into the heart is the love of gratitude. It is the sentiment that is generated from an experience of the immeasurable love of God, in His favour to the undeserving. But the love which results from an appreciation of the Divine character is a more exalted affection, and involves more immediately the principle of holiness.

The love of esteem, however, must originate in the love of gratitude. It is not till the heart is won by the discovery of the special tenderness of God, that its enmity towards Him is subdued, and an appreciation of His perfections springs up in the place of disesteem. And this is the true principle of morality; for it leads the soul to contemplate the Divine Exemplar with that delight which transforms it, in some measure, into the same image. Imperfect, indeed, is the copy,—still it *is* a likeness. The outline is faint, but the identity can be recognised. There are countless blemishes, but these do not wholly obscure the portrait; and one day, they will all be obliterated, and the features will shine out clear and bright in resemblance and relief, and will realise, to the utmost limit of created excellence, the beauty of holiness.

By this view of Christian morality, we perceive its extent. We perceive that it comprises graces as well as duties, — affections as well as acts. With reference to every virtue, it involves the principle, as well as the fruit. It is a new nature, not a mere outward reformation.

Thus, — a renunciation of the sins and follies of the world implies more than a breaking off from sinful or worldly practices. Here, more, perhaps, than in any other characteristic of a change of heart, there is danger of self-delusion. It might seem that the outward sacrifice would imply the internal dispotion; but too frequently it is not so. There may be much abstinence, and still no spiritual-mindedness. In some cases, the abstinence may be matter of necessity, and then it implies no self-denial; or it may be superstitious, and then it is of no value as a spiritual service.

In families, for instance, where a religious economy is maintained, the members may comply with regulations, and adopt a deportment, which identifies them outwardly with the most serious persons. Young women, who naturally fall in with the customs of home, — and who, from the restricted circle in which they move, are not exposed to exciting temptations,— may, almost without questioning, conform to a strict rule which marks them as distinct from the world, and seems, even to themselves, to accredit their title to real religion. And still the vital spark may be wanting, and the heart may never have rendered its allegiance to its rightful Lord.

Therefore, to urge restrictions, otherwise than as they are involved in the internal principle, is beginning at the wrong end, and may lead to much error. At the same time, it must be allowed that to neglect the landmark is even more perilous. For, if we permit a latitude of practice, from the fear lest strictness should identify religion with outward observance, we incur the charge of inconsistency, and sanction a laxity which our judgment disapproves. We should, indeed, bear in mind that, in relation both to the general principle of Christian morality, and to its individual features, the sentiment must be generated in the heart, and then developed in the conduct. *Internally* the root of holiness germinates, and expands into the particular graces which form the Christian *temper*;—*externally*, these all put forth their blossoms, and bear fruit, and produce the several virtues which characterise and adorn the Christian *deportment*. And thus the process of sanctification is carried on, and matured; the heart becomes more and more fit for its celestial dwelling-place, and the character more conformed to that evangelical standard, which is the object of its imitation.

To the two comprehensive principles of Christian ethics—justice and mercy—may be reduced every individual grace. And thus, the conspicuous exhibition of these Divine features in the plan for the redemption of sinners becomes the means of originating the transcript of them in the heart, and consequently is the groundwork of Christian excellence. The rendering to all their due, is the law of justice: — the doing to others as to ourselves, that of mercy and kindness. And nothing short of these is the aim, though, alas! in this state, they are not the realised attainment, of the Christian.

For it is the distinction of Gospel morality that it is *perfect* in its character. Every other system proposes a false or an inadequate standard. It accommodates its requisitions to human tastes, or lowers them to human capabilities. But the Christian's rule is perfect; and therefore it is always in advance of what is attained. It is, like the ideal beauty, present to the mind of the artist, before which his sublimest achievements in his own estimation fade and fail.

Thus, with reference to the first and most sacred obligations, the worship and the service of God, the offering which the Gospel requires is entire. It is the loyal unswerving allegiance of the heart. True, indeed, that this is never fully rendered, until the enemy's country is passed through, and its snares are left behind. But this undivided devotion, though not accomplished in endeavours, though not realized, is followed after with persevering and unwearied effort.

And hence proceed the sacrifices which Christians make for the cause of God. All they have, and more than all, is due; and therefore the expression of their hearts is, — what shall we render? It is their shame that they do no more. Why does the missionary brave climate, peril, hardship, and withering, often unproductive, toil? Why do he and his delicate, though not less enduring partner, undertake a service which often renders life one long privation? Why does the minister at home, in labours equally assiduous, — in weakness, perhaps, of body, and in depression of spirit, pour forth on the altar of the sanctuary a willing oblation of himself? And why does the private Christian — the daughter, wife, or mother, — in the habitual sacrifice of will, in the quiet endurance of suffering or reproach, in the pains-taking performance of benevolent offices, unweariedly persevere in a course which, while it may involve much hardship, offers not the stimulus of notoriety or fame? Why,—but that in all these there is an abiding conviction that their obligation infinitely exceeds their power of fulfilment, and that whatever may be their service or their sacrifice, it must fall immeasurably short of the return they owe.

The principle of justice involves humility; for if humility is the only fitting posture of the creature towards the Creator, much more is it of the pardoned offender towards the Author of forgiveness. And this sentiment, really generated, is developed also in all its actings. It is exemplified in every relation. It shows itself in an appropriate bearing towards all.

In education, it is not enough to inculcate this principle. We must, as in other cases, particularise results; for it is essential, even in childhood, to establish on a high footing the rules of social deference.

Of these rules filial respect is the earliest exemplification, and it is the fairest promise for their general fulfilment. It is the first modification of that sentiment of veneration which in its highest form is entertained by the Christian worshipper towards the Divine Parent; and which, in proportion to the degree of superiority, is felt by those, whose minds are under proper discipline, towards all who claim respect. In social intercourse, the sentiment of respect is the source of courtesy. It imparts to manner the delicacy which is essential to its perfection. It especially belongs to woman; for, as she requires respect as her privilege, she must be scrupulous in rendering it where it is due. And it is a proof of a well regulated mind to pay appropriate deference. Whether it be age, station, relationship, or office, it is a religious duty to admit and to observe the claim. True Christian feeling will dictate the expression of respect. It will teach youth to defer to experience, — the instructed to reverence the instructor.

It is to be regretted that due reverence is not always rendered, even by pious women, to the pastoral relationship. Yet, if there is one office which, more than any other, entitles to observance, it is surely that of a minister; — if there be any character which more than any other claims reverential attachment, it is that of the faithful labourer in the Lord's vineyard, the dispenser of the truths of God. And therefore it ill becomes any, who profess to acknowledge the ministerial claim, virtually to disregard it, — to indulge in censorious remarks, — to nurture a fastidious temper, or to wound in any way the feelings of those towards whom, officially and personally, the sentiment should pre-eminently be that of tenderness and respect.

Truth, again, is an essential part of justice: for truth, in word and deed, is the universal debt we owe; and its obligation is universally admitted. And there are few qualities so intrinsically valuable in relation to social worth, or so satisfactorily indicative of a right frame. Still, though a deficiency in truth, even in worldly estimation, implies a stain, there are, perhaps, few virtues of such rare fulfilment. Truth is the expression of a pure conscience — the outward embodying of that internal rectitude which is the reflection of Perfect Truth. But too often does the counterfeit pass current for the real coin.

Profession is often the enemy of truth. Profession, in the first instance, may not ininvolve insincerity; but it may induce it. We may mean what we say, when we profess great intentions; but, either our fervour may diminish, or our capacity of fulfilment may not be commensurate with our enthusiasm of purpose; and then we may be tempted to continue profession as a cloak for inconstancy or want of power. Thus, profession may become mere cant or lip-service, — than which nothing is so injurious to moral uprightness, and so detrimental to the cause of virtue.

Faithfulness is therefore the concomitant of truth. It is associated with it in the Divine character; and it is necessary to its existence as a human virtue. Faithfulness in our engagements, — truth in all our transactions, — strict integrity, not merely when we meet the eyes of men, but in our secret thoughts, — are characteristics of the Christian conduct, and distinguish it from that which merely seeks the approbation of the world. Evangelical uprightness is, indeed, quite a different thing from worldly honour. It is the internal love of truth, which shows itself in seeking, speaking, and keeping truth; and is the consequence of a belief in the truth, and an acquaintance with Him who is *The Truth*. And this real delight in truth is a Christian happiness. For, certainly, as the great philosopher of our country says, "It is heaven upon earth to have a man's mind move in charity, rest in Providence, and turn upon the poles of truth."*

The love of truth is evidenced in the lesser as well as in the graver transactions of life, — in things of trivial moment, as in those of stirring interest. The love of truth shows itself in testimony, — testimony as to indifferent matters; in the accurate selection of circumstances, and in the faithful expression of our opinions. And it is such a love of truth which gives, as it were, a pledge for our stability, — a love of truth for its own sake; and though involving, still not to be merged in, any other honourable sentiment. For, as has been well observed, "It is in what are termed trifles that the lover of truth can evince the sincerity of his attachment. I may abhor a slanderous lie, a boasting lie, a dishonest lie; but if I practise lies which bear no other character than that of simple deception, I show, in the above instances only, that I hate ill nature, that I hate vanity, that I hate dishonesty, but not that I hate or disapprove of falsehood." *

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* Bacon's Essays.

There is no more important sentiment to instil, even in infancy, than a love of truth. As Doctor Johnson wisely says, "If a child relates any occurrence, and mentions that it took place in one window, when it really happened in another, he ought to be set right." The opposite propensity is, alas! often one of the earliest symptoms exhibited of the natural depravation of the heart. The child that from its birth has seemed to breathe only the atmosphere of truth, seeks to screen its infant fault from the eyes even of its tender parent, and learns to lisp a lie. And deeply does the spirit of the Christian mother grieve at this sad indication of the germ of evil! Deeply does it mourn at this too plain indication that the bias is

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* Essays by the Rev. H. Woodward.

perverted, and that the inclination, which sways the will, is to evil rather than to good !

Falsehood is justly considered as the most serious offence of childhood; and those parents who are the most lenient in their discipline, are often disposed to correct it with a severity which no other fault provokes. It is no doubt important to mark it with a stigma which may dwell on the recollection; but it is also important to mark it as a *sin.* It is in this light that it should be characterized with pre-eminent abhorrence; and the aim in its reproof should be, to excite in the mind of the youngest offender that sorrow which arises not merely from a sense of parental displeasure, but from the consciousness of the spiritual offence. And thus the child should be led to understand and feel that Christianity is the essence of truth; and that without the love of truth there can be no love of God, no likeness to Him, no approach to goodness.

With regard, indeed, to Christian conduct generally, the object of the religious parent should be to realize the connexion between every grace and the principle from which it flows. The duties of domestic and social life, — the tempers, which, more even than outward actions, constitute the character, and determine its proficiency, — the efforts of benevolence, which, themselves the exemplifications of the law of mercy, are binding on the Christian even by the law of Gospel justice: all these are inseparable parts of that holiness of which the ground-work is *Love.* And it is by the development of this truly Christian sentiment, in all its bearings, — both as it respects its Highest Source, and transfers itself from Him to all whom for His sake it ought to affect, — that the religious and moral character is matured, and the soul qualified to attain the end of its existence, namely, the enjoyment of that Divine Being who only can satisfy it. In the transfusion of this heavenly sentiment into the heart its renovation consists. Where the Holy Spirit finds entrance the love of God is shed abroad, and draws up the spirit to Him for whom it longs; and thus is realized the progressive sanctification of the believer. It is realized in the perpetual aspirations after an eternal portion, — in the increasing insight into the excellencies of the Divine character,—in the fuller assurance of the special favour and love of God,—and in the more implicit confidence and entire repose in His faithfulness.

Those who have sought God early, will in this way find His promises made good. They will thus grow in grace; they will advance, trembling it may be, yet securely; conscious of but small attainment, but still of progress,—of inherent weakness, but of infused strength; and believing that their steps are assured, their refreshments provided, and their eternal home prepared.

CHAPTER VI.

THE EMPLOYMENT OF TIME.

> "The mind that lies fallow but a single day, sprouts up in follies that are only to be killed by a constant and assiduous culture."—ADDISON.

THE distinctions of society are not likely to be felt as invidious, so long as the intellectual superiority of the higher ranks keeps pace with their elevation; and so long as they fulfil the offices assigned to them with the same assiduity, with which those of an inferior grade accomplish their daily task. Labour of one kind or another is the condition of humanity; and though in some cases the obligation is chiefly of a moral nature, and therefore not absolutely compulsory, it is no less binding as a duty, and no less essential to the general welfare. The zeal of the higher classes, indeed, in the prosecution of their functions, is even more important than the industry of the lower; for, besides the superior value of their labour, their assiduity is an incentive and an example to those below them, and is the best guarantee for expecting the improvement of the latter. On the contrary, we all know that the inactivity and luxuriousness of an aristocracy are amongst the first symptoms of civil decrepitude, and that they presage and induce either internal revolution, or the total disruption and ruin of an empire.

The necessity of occupation should therefore be one of the earliest lessons instilled in education, and happily it is one which childhood is not averse to learn. However averse very young people may be to *steady* application, childhood is the time when employment is the *least* irksome, and when there is, perhaps, the least disposition to entire indolence; and therefore it is the period when the habit of occupation should be formed, and when the principle should be impressed that idleness is both inglorious and sinful.

The obligation to labour amongst the higher classes is, it has been remarked, chiefly of a moral nature. As it regards women, this is generally true. The other sex are for the most part under a natural as well as civil obligation to some sort of toil; and even those, who are professionally free, are often, from station or other circumstances, equally subjected to the yoke. But it is the privilege of women of the superior order to be provided for, served, and protected by others; and any labour, therefore, which they undertake is chiefly voluntary.

As nothing, however, that is useful can be achieved without effort—as intellectual culture can neither be attained nor kept up without much application, it will be allowed that the end of existence cannot be answered, nor our position in society maintained, unless we seek out our share of wholesome occupation, and employ ourselves in such seemly and honourable exercises, as may ensure to us consideration and respect. The women of oriental climes may waste their lives on silken couches, content to recline in listless luxury, and inhale the breezes of their cedar fans: but this is a melancholy proof of the low condition of the sex in certain countries. The spinner who turns her wheel,—the gleaner who gathers up her sheaves,—even the hardy wife of the Norwegian fisher who plies her oar, and lades her bark amid storm and tempest, fulfil a higher and a happier destiny; for they taste the reward of toil, and have the satisfaction of knowing that they live to do some good.

Christianity has raised woman to the moral and intellectual rank she holds; and the purer its form, and the more genuine its profession, the higher is the character of the sex, and the greater the respect with which it is regarded. To the superior standard of religion in this country may therefore be ascribed the excellence of English women; and in proportion as real piety increases, will be their improvement. But if they are favoured with most privileges,—if their character stands high,—if they enjoy a position superior to that of most even of their continental neighbours, their responsibility to profit by their advantages, to maintain their reputation, and to improve to the best account their privileges, is commensurately great. And, therefore, they should beware of indulging a preference of amusement to mental culture,—of frivolous pursuit to useful occupation. They should be on their guard lest refinement unfit them for exertion,—lest the appliances of wealth enervate, and the seductions of pleasure divert them from useful employment,— and lest, above all, the excitements to every taste and fancy which are so liberally administered, and so temptingly set forth, create a dislike to whatever is sober and rational, and produce a morbid craving for dangerous stimulants.

The economy of time is important, for the attainment of what is intrinsically valuable, for the prosecution of what is useful, and for the formation of a healthful tone of mind.

There is no truth more strongly enforced by experience than that the more we know and do, the more we find that there is to be learned and effected. The trifler oppressed with *ennui* sighs to get rid of vacant hours; whilst those who have glanced with a longing eye at the innumerable avenues to knowledge, or have tasted the well-spring of benevolence, find that life is too short a period for the accomplishment of their object and the satisfaction of their desires. The paths of knowledge and of philanthropy widen as we proceed; and as their ranges increase, our desire to embrace them becomes more ardent. The object in education should therefore be to lead to the threshold, and to invite to the entrance, for when the first step is taken, the increase of appetite is the best pledge for perseverance.

There can be no doubt that in the attainment of useful information, or the performance of works of kindness, the time and faculties of woman are well, profitably, and suitably employed, whatever be her abilities or social position. Of course, in the selection both of intellectual pursuits and benevolent designs discretion should be used; but, generally speaking, personal improvement, and the contributing to the happiness of others, are the ends which a woman should have in view, and which education should teach her to prosecute. They are also the criteria by which she may test her pursuits, and select and regulate her occupations.

In considering the first of these, namely, individual improvement, we should estimate not merely the general, but the particular suitability of the pursuit, and the tendency which it has to promote the excellence and grace of the female character. Time is not lost in the cultivation of faculties, which render woman more amiable or agreeable; or in the study of literature, which awakens her to the love of intellectual beauty. Nor is it lost in the attainment of accomplishments, for which there may be indications of a natural taste, and which, when regarded as subordinate to more important pursuits, are a refreshment to her own mind, and a means of giving pleasure to others. But time is lost in the prosecution of acquirements, in which there is little probability of success, of accomplishments not congenial to the taste, or adapted to the station, in the multiplication of studies not essential, and for the mastering of which, there may be neither leisure nor competent ability.

The principles that we should labour early to instil, are a regard for the value of time, and an accurate estimate of the comparative importance of the calls that are made upon it. It is of great moment to impress the conscience with a feeling of responsiblity in the expenditure of time, and with the duty of applying each portion of it to its best purpose. And this is effected, not merely by an appeal to reason and to moral sense, but by establishing the habit of assiduous application. To permit listlessness in a child is a great error. Even a restless search for employment is better than an indolent contentedness with doing nothing. Not that education, in the present day is, in general, faulty in this particular. So long as young people are in their school-room, they are not suffered to rest upon their oars. Whether their application there is usually turned to the best account, and that thirst for improvement inspired which would ensure their continued progress, may be more questionable. For, as has been before remarked, the succeeding period in life is not always marked by the same assiduity. It would seem that, in some cases, the habit has been purely mechanical; that application has scarcely been regarded as a duty, or, at least, that its obligation has been thought to terminate with the discipline that enforced it. When such is the result of education, it is evident that there has been a fundamental error in its conduct, or in the use that has been made of its advantages.

The actual acquirements of early youth are valuable chiefly as preliminary steps. They surmount some of the drudgery of learning, and give the advantage of a start over the more tardy student. And, what is of greater importance, they habituate the mind to exertion, they try its capabilities, and bring forth its latent strength. But they are too imperfect, too much the result of mere memory and instruction — too little that of thought, to be of much intrinsic value, except as the ground-work for future proficiency. They are the blossoms which give promise indeed of fruit, but which are not themselves the harvest.

When, however, the higher faculties of the mind are brought into play, when taste discovers its preferences, and judgment exercises its discrimination, and when the obligations of duty are understood in their relative bearings, and felt in their full force, then it is that knowledge of every kind turns to its true account, and that we reap the benefit of previous labour Then, whatever has been cast into the crucible will come forth as available metal, and, by the use then made of it, will be determined its real value.

It is at this period, therefore, that assiduity should increase, not diminish; and that, far from thinking that the work is done, there should be the greater anxiety to improve the precious moments of independence. Young women, especially, may consider youth as the period when, more than at any other, they are personally accountable for their time, and when they have more leisure, probably, than they will enjoy at any subsequent age, for intellectual advance. From the day that they leave their school-room, to that when they may be called to active family duties, they enjoy leisure which they may afterwards wish in vain to recall, and which, if trifled away, is worse than a blank in relation to future improvement. The habit of application, once lost, is with difficulty recovered; the youthful vigour, if suffered to relax, subsides into inertness; and the sanguine temperament that sees in difficulties only an incentive to exertion, and a sweetener of success, if it has no adequate stimulus, sinks into indifference, or seeks excitement in unprofitable pursuits.

Yet, although the consequences of the non-improvement of time in youth are so obviously injurious, it is the period, which, of all others, perhaps, is the most frequently misemployed If we turn to fashionable life, it is with deep concern that we must view the frivolity of the pursuits and engagements which occupy young women, on their first entrance on the world; at the profligate expenditure of their time on objects, not one of which is worthy a moment's serious notice. The whirl of a London season is an effectual antidote to reflection, and precludes even social enjoyment: nightly dissipation induces morning lassitude; and the latter yields only to the renewed excitement of the evening crowd.

To London may succeed the lounge of some frequented watering place, whose medicated spring, or far-famed physician, is to remedy what the toils of amusement have impaired, and where even provincial gaieties are sought for with feverish anxiety, and are welcomed as a means of getting rid of time.

But the country home may present a scene still more disappointing; for thither, instead of the wholesome pleasures of retirement, the early morning hours, the tranquil occupation, the day so peacefully and healthfully varied by books, by the garden, by walks to the cottages or schools, by refreshing converse with Nature in her fairest and sublimest form, are transplanted the fictitious forms and habits of town society, and the unsuitable and vain pursuits of fashion.

Then, indeed, time hangs heaviest upon hand, and country gaieties are too dull, or of too rare occurrence to satisfy the thirst for amusement. The novel will not fill up the unrelieved hours of a rainy day, and a visit to a rural thane does little to enliven the tedium of the morning. Recourse is had to some new game, some fresh invented frolic,—perhaps, to some practical jest, of which the folly and even coarseness seem the only recomendations. Such instances may be but rare, but where they do occur, well may those, whose tastes have been formed in a better mould, look with unqualified surprise at the amusements selected by some who bear the palm of fashion, and rest at least content with their exclusion from the coterie, and with their less distinguished and more rational employments.

The votaries of pleasure seem to forget that the object of life is not amusement; that, whatever may be the privileges of their station, they are responsible for the fulfilment of its duties; and that, in truth, they never so much neglect their own happiness, or prejudice their own interest, as when they seek only momentary gratification, and weary themselves for vanity. Did they but consider how much respect a different course would ensure, how much satisfaction the right employment of hours would bring, and to what beneficial purposes, individually and collectively, they might expend leisure, they could scarcely fail to rouse themselves from inactivity, and give themselves to pursuits which become them as rational and accountable beings. It is the conviction of many, that, in the present aspect of things, there is much to excite apprehension and solicitude, that the spirit of insubordination is abroad, and that difference of station is regarded with mistaken jealousy. Alas! must we not acknowledge, that, whilst there is much to correct in the feelings and practices of the humbler ranks, and too frequently a groundless dissatisfaction on their parts, there is also occasion for blame in those whom greater knowledge renders more responsible, and on whom it is incumbent to give the tone to society. The sight of luxuriousness or indolence in them fosters disrespect and envy; and the eyes of the people are quick to detect in their superiors blemishes, from which they flatter themselves that they are exempt. On the contrary, the belief that superiority in station does not entail inactivity,—that the higher ranks are as assiduous in the employment of their leisure, as the humbler in the prosecution of their required toil,—that the former live for themselves less even than the latter,—is above all things likely to diffuse content, and to inspire the poorer classes with affection and confidence towards those whom they thus learn to consider their benefactors.

And it must not be forgotten that women, even young women, may materially contribute to produce this impression. Let them but spend the hours that are at their disposal in profitable pursuits ; let them devote the prime of their life to their own intellectual and moral culture; and they would reap their reward in the consciousness of their individual progress, and in the increased esteem of society. And although they would lose their relish for the vapid conversation of triflers, for idle amusements, and for public display, they would feel that they were passing their time in a manner worthy intelligent beings, and their influence might be a stimulus to higher virtues in the other sex.

But even were it not so,—should they not, in this latter particular, exercise as successful a sway as might be wished, they would at least exculpate themselves from the guilt of misapplied time and abused privileges, would advance in knowledge and in grace, and would lay up a resource and a consolation for themselves in all the vicissitudes of life.

A little reflection might assuredly convince many of the gay, fluttering beings, who now adorn the circles of fashion, how derogatory to them are the follies in which they participate, how unworthy their position in society, their intellectual capacity, their early education. The benevolence of Addison led him to lament that "sufficient pains were not taken in finding out for women proper employments," and to apply himself to remedy that deficiency. In the present day, a similar apology cannot be made. Yet, with a slight allowance for the manners of the age, is not the following portrait too descriptive of what still exists?—and can we point out any very decided superiority in the pursuits of many of our own day to those which so deservedly called forth the Spectator's strictures? "Their amusements seem contrived for them rather as they are women, than as they are reasonable creatures, and are more adapted to the sex than to the species. The toilet is their great scene of business, and the right adjusting of their hair the principal employment of their lives. The sorting of a suit of ribbons is reckoned a very good morning's work; and if they make an excursion to a mercer, or a toy shop, so great a fatigue makes them unfit for any thing else all the day after. Their more serious occupations are sewing and embroidery, and their greatest drudgery the preparation of jellies and sweetmeats."

In the "drudgery," indeed, the fine ladies of the present day take no part; but it may be a question whether their pursuits are more intellectual, or equally profitable.

Happily, as the censure in some cases is but too applicable, so the commendation is in others equally deserved. Amongst women of our own age, many there are, "of a more elevated life and conversation that move in an exalted sphere of knowledge and virtue, and join all the beauties of the mind" to external decorations. May the number of such increase; and may the example of their superiority be a stimulus to others to imitate them!

The preceding remarks, it may be said, apply to an individual class, and *that*, though the most important, is not the most numerous. The generality of the sex are restricted to a more humble sphere, and have not the opportunity, and, it is to be hoped, not the inclination to join in the follies of fashionable life. Yet even here it must be questioned whether there is that scrupulous regard to the value of time, especially in youth, which ensures its profitable expenditure. Here, again, as soon as the discipline of childhood is relaxed, the culture of the mind is too often intermitted.

The pursuits of young women are too frequently of a trifling nature, not calculated to improve their minds, or to render them useful in their station in life. At the very period when they should practically apply their previous acquirements,—when they should avail themselves of what they have learnt, as a matter of course they shut up their books. And though it may be natural at this age to desire recreation, and young people may themselves look forward to it as the period of cessation from their tasks, and as the commencement of a perpetual holiday: yet the directors of their youth should now excite them by fresh motives, and press upon them the duty of voluntary application, and the responsibility which from henceforth rests upon themselves.

Religion, no doubt, affords the most effectual incentive to the economy of time, and the safest guide to the apportioning of it. For, by religion, we are instructed in the true object of life, and are taught to view the whole of our existence here as a continued discipline. It both points out to us, and enables us to fulfil, the duties of our station. And whilst it instructs us to judge of all things with a reference to these, it urges us to the pursuit of whatever may qualify us for their performance. Religion teaches us that the end of our present existence is to prepare for one of infinite duration; and thus it affixes to time an incalculable value, and awakens us to a sense of responsibility for its use.

To spiritual exercises, and the pursuit of spiritual knowledge, religion of course assigns primary importance; and as the sense of immeasurable defect must ever accompany our endeavours in these respects, the stimulus to assiduous and strenuous exertion must be perpetual.

But not only does it arouse to the obligation of spiritual attainment, and to the performance of those services which have God for their immediate object, but it apportions to every social obligation its relative claim. It furnishes us with a comparative scale of duties, and according to its standard, should be the prominence assigned to each several employment.

The motives furnished by religion are of both universal and special application. They urge diligence generally in all matters of serious importance, and they descend to subordinate and minute particulars; so that, in truth, there is not a moment of which religion does not take cognizance, and for which it does not point out the most fitting occupation; and it operates in this, as in all other particulars of moral conduct, not so much by individual precepts as by a general principle. The spirit of Christianity is ever active; it is ever watchful and assiduous: it prescribes, as a universal rule, that we should be "not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit; serving" also "the Lord."

Domestic duties furnish an important sphere, and take the lead in social obligations. No extraneous effort atones for the neglect of these. Here we feel that the sex are in their right place; here they are sure of being useful; here too, we know them to be influenced, not by motives of display, but by the simple desire of making others happy.

There is no rank which exempts women from these offices, and no situation where some portion of time must not be devoted to their discharge. Not but that, in many particulars of domestic duty, and especially in the management of a household, many hours may be wasted from want of diligence and method; and we may think ourselves to have been most meritoriously industrious, when five minutes' real assiduity would have achieved the desultory work of a morning. Women not unfrequently fritter away time by this inefficient mode of business; and though they are not unoccupied, do little to any purpose. To establish, therefore, the habit of alertness, of promptly discharging the work of the hour, is an essential part of early discipline, and mainly conduces to subsequent improvement.

Were this habit really attained, many, doubtless, who now excuse themselves from want of time, might find leisure both for intellectual culture and for the labours of active benevolence. The inactivity and indulgence of fashionable life are, sometimes copied by persons who have no pretensions to its elegance. Amongst those whom neither station nor wealth entitles to an exemption from the homelier occupations of a household, we do not always find the alacrity which conduces so much to domestic arrangement, and turns every hour to good account. We may see, in the younger members of families a disinclination to active employments; a propensity to waste their time on dress, or some elegant trifle, which may be recommended, perhaps, by the example of the higher classes, and may thus tempt their imitation. But the discharge of appropriate duties argues true superiority ; and diligence in our station is a far more sure road to respect, than an attempt at pursuits, in which eminence, if desirable, is not likely to be attained without the leisure and appliances of a superior rank, and a taste for which may only excite discontent with a subordinate position.

The leisure which youth may afford should, in all cases, be employed as a preparative for subsequent usefulness ; and our choice of occupations should therefore be guided by a reference to our probable condition. The sphere of philanthropy, indeed, is open to all ranks ; this is common ground; and whilst the exercise of benevolence awakens the rich to sympathy, and realizes to them scenes, of which otherwise they would have no conception, it enlarges the heart and exalts the mind of all; and unites all in an occupation the most honourable to humanity. In the present day, a thousand channels for benevolent exertion present themselves, a thousand opportunities which young people of every condition may embrace, and by availing themselves of which they may, without infringing any propriety, or attempting any thing for which they are not competent, assist in the great work of doing good to others. Surely such employments are far more satisfactory, and more truly elevating, than the little nothings which often engross interest. Can a young woman hesitate between spending her leisure in what will bring happiness to others, and wasting it upon unprofitable fancies. When the gay Sunday dress, the costume, which by its profusion of ribbon or embroidery is a caricature of fashion and a burlesque on taste, is the result of personal assiduity,—when this has been purchased by the expenditure of what is infinitely more valuable than gold, does it repay the cost, the sacrifice of time, which might have been improved either to purposes of duty, or of personal benefit, or of kindness to others, or of healthful exercise, or of rest? Would it not be far better to attract less notice by outward decoration, and to be better adorned within,—to be less eager for admiration, and more for improvement,—to be more indifferent to the possession of perishable fascinations, and more intent on the cultivation of intrinsic graces?

There is no doubt that, in many cases, the duty has only to be pointed out, in order to be recognised. The mistake may often arise from ignorance or want of thought; and when the obligation is urged upon the conscience, the heart will answer to the appeal. When an example of assiduity is given by the higher class, it does not lack imitation; and therefore it is peculiarly incumbent on that class to take the lead, to show their sense of the responsibility which belongs to station, and to stimulate others to co-operate with them in all good works. Such associations have a two-fold advantage. They unite their members in a common interest, and thus inspire mutual esteem; and by proving how beneficially time may be improved, they increase the estimation of its value, and induce a scrupulous regard for its employment. It is matter of congratulation that, in the present day, there are many who, according to their ability, exercise themselves in administering to the relief of those who stand in need, and who thus turn their leisure to its best account,—that, especially in the highest rank, there are amongst us of "honourable women not a few," who esteem themselves but as stewards of their time, and who, from Christian motives, and with a truly Christian spirit, are assiduous in promoting those undertakings which proceed from the "charity that never faileth." And happily there are many likewise, of whom the ability is not so great, but from whom the sacrifice is perhaps still greater, who by diligence in their callings earn a little leisure for their own disposal, and grudge not to spend it upon the disinterested labours of benevolence.

It should indeed be a subject of anxious endeavour with all so to bring up children, and to guide youth, that they may feel industry essential to their happiness, — that they may attain that tenderness of conscience which will render them uneasy under the misapplication of time, and solicitous to economise it for purposes worthy its expenditure.

Religion, it has been said, affords the only effectual motives for such economy. Were it not for the stimulus religion applies, and the prospects it affords, there might be a question between present ease and pleasure and the satisfaction arising from virtuous occupation; but the incentives of Christianity are so urgent, that to those who admit them there is no alternative. The obligation to redeem the time is grounded upon the importance of the works to be achieved, and the greatness of the penalty incurred by the non-performance of them.

So overwhelming, indeed, is the sense of this responsibility to those who are awakened to its importance, that the knowledge of our deficiency cannot fail to press heavily upon the conscience. The contrast between obligation and performance is so startling, that we must tremble under the conviction of demerit and its just consequences. When we reflect on the pressing nature of claims incurred,—on the paramount urgency of spiritual obligations, and also of duties, moral, domestic, and social, which, according to their respective importance, demand attention,—on the brevity and uncertainty of the period allowed for their discharge; in short, on all that we ought to do, and on the little we accomplish, — we must at once be brought to the confession of our own demerit, and of our need of the ample supply of Gospel grace. Let but a single day be reviewed; the improvement that may have been made in it, the duties performed, the good accomplished, placed at their full value; and on the other hand, the moments wasted, the obligations unfulfilled, be made the counterpoise: and will not conscience strike the balance so much against us, that our appeal can be made only to the bar of unconditional mercy?

But deficiency and unworthiness are the glass in which to view the plenitude of Divine grace. They too are the plea to induce us to accept the proffered gift. If, without considering what we have done wrong, simply on the ground of omission and non-improvement, our hearts condemn us, what have we to do but to avail ourselves of the discharge which the Gospel freely tenders for the burthened conscience, and of the assistance it holds out to those who ask for help?

The arguments for diligence and assiduity lose nothing from being placed on an evangelical basis. These duties rest on the same footing with all Christian obligations, and are essential to Christian proficiency. They are founded on our sense of gratitude; for the price paid for redemption is a perpetual incentive to the efforts of those who feel they have an interest in the blessing procured at such a cost: and they are involved in the obligations for personal holiness, which is the evidence and pledge of individual acceptance. Nor must we forget that the diligent advance in religion and moral attainment is as conducive to our real happiness in this state, as it is essential as a qualification for the inheritance of the "spirits of the just made perfect."

CHAPTER VII.

STUDY—ITS MODE.

The term study is not unfrequently misapplied. In reference to our own sex, we are apt to attach to it a pedantic meaning, and to think that when a woman affects to study, she is attempting that, which is out of keeping with her character, and beyond her powers. And we often mistake for study what is undeserving its name, and expect that an imperfect and desultory pursuit of intellectual objects will produce results, which are the reward only of a well-appointed and unremitted application.

Study, in its true acceptance, is essential to all intellectual proficiency; it might be added, that in the higher classes it is essential to moral discipline. For where the training of corporeal toil is wanting, the labour of the mind affords the most effectual check to all those fancies and propensities which may require regulation or restraint, and it forms habits which are favourable to the exercise of virtue.

By study should be understood that application of mind to intellectual subjects which is prompted by a real love of knowledge, and which calls forth whatever faculties may be most subservient to the attainment of the end immediately in view. Nothing short of this is study. Much, however, passes current for it, which does not imply this mental exercise, and which therefore does not produce such beneficial effects.

The mere act of receiving instruction is often miscalled study. Young persons are said to be studious, if they appear to be employed in learning. Yet they may be at their lessons all the day, and still never study. They may be engaged in their tasks early and late,—may have a master or an occupation for every hour, —may take their exercise by the clock,—and yet never apply their minds really to intellectual attainment. For they may be, in the first place, strangers to the love of knowledge. They may not love knowledge for its own sake. Their application may be prompted by no desire to arrive at truth, — they may have no real solicitude to investigate the mysteries of nature, — they may even possess no taste to enjoy literary beauty. They may be industrious, perhaps, from habit, or from a compliance with the wishes of their instructors, or from a love of commendation, and they may bring to their work an aptitude to learn ; and thus they may be said to be assiduous in their studies : but, if they advance no further, they will be found to have bestowed all their pains to but very little purpose.

For, in such cases, the faculties are only partially exercised. Memory seems chiefly to be brought into play. And thus branches of instruction which, when rightly pursued, are subservient to mental improvement, become, under this system, available to no important end. The study of language, for example, may be very conducive to the strengthening of the mind; but when the only aim is to obtain an aptitude in a foreign dialect, and when this is achieved by almost a mechanical process, it is questionable whether language, thus pursued, is at all effectual to the development and improvement of the mental powers. Pupils, on this plan, are scarcely allowed to make an independent effort. They are taught their grammars and their vocabularies; they learn to recite with effect, and to converse in a foreign idiom with fluency; they are made familiar with some of the standard literature of other countries, not as an intellectual pleasure, but as a part of the routine of learning; they are taught to read the books, that they may acquire the language,—they do not acquire the language that they may read the books.

One cannot but suspect that the desire of being reputed an accomplished person is, in part at least, the motive for this sort of instruction. It would seem that in some instances, where young persons have been quite burthened with acquirements, no purpose has been answered but that of giving them a little more éclat. They have no relish for literary pursuits; they have no wish to follow up for themselves what has been begun by their teachers; no greater desire to open up the stores with which the keys of their education may have furnished them, than if their only accomplishment had been the exercise of their needle, their only language their native tongue. They may have some pleasure, perhaps, in the consciousness of having learned so much, and their parents may take a pride in enumerating their acquirements; but it would be difficult to point out any really useful results achieved by all their instruction. Except, perhaps, speaking French, there is scarcely a practical purpose to which their lessons are subsequently applied.

Amongst persons of an ordinary tone of mind, fashion has even had much influence on the conduct of education. There has been a rage for certain systems or pursuits; and these have been adopted with the same avidity as a Parisian costume.

The fashion now is to multiply acquirements. It is impossible to learn too much. *Lingomania* is especially prevalent. Frequent visits to the Continent, and intercourse with foreigners (with which fashion also has much to do), afford, no doubt, natural inducements to the study of languages; and the French nurse and the German master are provided in accordance with the taste of the day.

Without, however, the slightest disparagement of German studies, may it not be questioned whether the proficiency, ordinarily attained in them by female scholars, repays for the time expended, — and even whether the pursuit of German, as it is generally acquired, is likely to be very beneficial to young women of our own country? Why, it may be asked, is this language so much in repute, that a German grammar and dictionary are to be found upon the table of many young women, who seem to have ordinarily no taste for laborious studies, but who consider their education incomplete until they have made some progress in this most difficult tongue? It may be surmised that their acquaintance with it is not very perfect, and that few who attempt, can, after all their pains, do more than speak a few familiar phrases, and warble one of Sontag's songs; for German is no mere dialect. Whatever empiricism may promise to effect in the way of its acquirement, the languages of antiquity present not greater intricacies, or profounder depths, than this most venerable of modern tongues.

But should the language be really mastered, it may still be a question whether the literature of Germany is quite suitable for young women; whether Goethe, Schiller, Wieland, are authors the most calculated to improve their minds, or even to refine their taste. Our female students will scarcely undertake the *philosophy* of our Teutonian neighbours. However familiar they may be with the names of Leibnitz and of Kant, Madame de Stael's digest of German metaphysics will probably satisfy the most ardent disciple of her own sex. Shall we send our young women for their *divinity* to Germany? Divinity, indeed, once brought from that country its best teachers; and to the few rays which first emanated from Erfurt and from Wirtemberg the light of truth owes its revival. But German theology is quite different now; and when it finds its way into the laborious commentary, still more when it insinuates itself into the popular treatise, the sound in faith detect its influence, and feel it their duty to warn against its poison. It, however, has little to captivate the gentle scholar;

and whatever may be the danger of German philosophy or theology to the learned, it is too profound for female heads.

The extraordinary persons who have given so high a name to German literature did not, it may be conjectured, write for women. Their works are for the privileged, for those of their own sex who can understand them, — who can separate the base from the precious, the true from the false; and who, themselves habituated to abstract speculations, can detect meanings which escape the unitiated, and discriminate the moral or the mischief which may lurk beneath the guise of drama or of fable. The question then may be repeated, whether the ardour with which this language is pursued might not be more profitably spent? It is, there is no doubt, a difficult, and it has not yet been a common study, — and difficulty and rarity are great recommendations; but the old classic tongues would be as unusual and arduous an attainment, and, perhaps, a selection from their stores might be as suitable for the perusal of young women as their more favourite German authors. Lady Jane Grey probably learned more wisdom from Plato, than our modern ladies would do from most of the philosophers of the Rhine, — could they understand them; and we may question whether even the poets of Greece and Rome are not a safer entertainment than many of the German writers of the sentimental class.

To return, however, to instruction generally. It is not merely with regard to language that any system which does not call forth the reasoning faculties is in fault: in every other branch of knowledge it is generally wrong. History may be read, and, as it were, learned by rote; to make abstracts or extracts of it may be a part of the allotted task, and may register events upon the memory; and the little girl, with her learning fresh upon her, may be more accurately familiar with dates and epochs than the student of half a century: but the end of the information acquired may never be pointed out, nor reflection on it encouraged. The *philosophy* of history may be wholly forgotten. The moral to be learned from past examples may be seldom deduced; the causes or the consequences of events may not be exhibited; and the profit and pleasure to be derived from the study of character, from tracing the working of general principles, or the development of individual propensities, may never be afforded by the dry and laborious lessons of which the young pupil is the subject.

Of what benefit, it may well be asked, is this newspaper knowledge of the events of preceding ages? Historians, indeed, give their own comments, draw their own deductions, instil their own moral or political sentiments, recommend their own religion or philosophy. But, besides that on these very points the caution is, in many cases, to be given against, and not in favour of the views instilled, it is not by infusing the sentiments of another, but by aiding us in the search of truth, that reading is instructive. To lead the mind to exercise its own powers, reflect on all that is brought before it, inquire into what it does not comprehend, trace out and confirm the truths which sound philosophy teaches, and past experience exemplifies, should be the part of those who are the guides of youth, and who would lead the way to true wisdom.

The same observations are of course applicable to all other branches of instruction. We must, as has been before said, beware of the old error of mistaking the means for the end, and of forgetting that the one may, or may not be subservient to the other. It is the wish of all to render their children by education wiser and better; but some fail just at the most important point, at the last link, — the application; and then all their labour is thrown away.

The system complained of has also another disadvantage,—that it fails in rendering the acquisition of knowledge interesting, and thereby indirectly producing a love of it. Not that young people should be entrapped into learning, or taught to play with their tasks. The ascent to knowledge may be smoothed, but it must still be steep; and if we turn aside to avoid the difficulty, we shall never gain the top. The exercise itself is salutary; and the reward is the more valued, because it is the result of toil.

But although we are assured that there is no easy path to learning, we feel that it is of the utmost importance to render study an occupation in which satisfaction and pleasure may be found; and this can only be done by judiciously calling into play all the intellectual faculties, and thus imparting to each of them a consciousness of healthful and profitable action. There can be no question that the mere learning by rote is the most irksome and the least refreshing exercise to the mind, especially as the mind itself makes progress. On the contrary, the application of the reason, although not made without greater effort, produces an internal satisfaction, which increases with the experience of it, and fascinates even the youthful student to the labour which it requires. Whilst then we know that memory is essential to learning, and that, as it is the faculty the earliest developed, childhood is the period when it ought to be both strengthened and furnished; yet there can be no greater mistake than to avail ourselves in education of it *exclusively*, and thus to render acquirement a dry and fatiguing task. When learning is associated in the mind with nothing but memorial exercises, — when the recollection of words, events, or terms, appears to be the chief object desired by the teacher, — when even the beauties of literature are not so much pointed out to the taste, as they are burdened upon the memory, can we wonder that the result is a disinclination from mental application, rather than a relish for it, and a wish to discontinue a course which is so little attractive?

On the contrary, encourage the mind to know its own powers; give it its true elevation; let the young pupil feel that there is something ennobling and improving in study, so that she does not rise from her instruction without gaining some new thought, without the consciousness that her judgment, taste, and reason have been nourished and strengthened, — and she will gain an appetite for intellectual food; she will herself desire it for its own sake, and persevere in seeking it when left to her free choice. The hours of study should leave behind them that same sort of delightful glow which wholesome exercise occasions to the body, — the glow of health and action, resulting from the consciousness of virtuous labour, enhancing the pleasure of rest, but unattended by fatigue or exhaustion. And it may be added, that whilst application should be earnest while it lasts, it is also most important both that it should not be protracted, and that, when at an end, the relaxation should be equally complete. The young frame should recover its elasticity by the unconstrained play of life and limb; the principle of vitality, which in early years is so strong and buoyant, should have scope; the little girl should be allowed to gambol as nature dictates, without fearing to tear her frock or displace her hair; and the happiness of her free spirit should expand itself without any of the fetters of stiff punctilio. For, oh! short is the period of childish gaiety! The mind too soon becomes anxious, and the brow careworn; and the joyous smile, which in infancy shines forth as a sunbeam, soon contracts a shade of sadness, and the laughing eye a cast of sorrow. Let us not then forestall the cloud, subtract from the scanty sum of happiness, nor by our own acts prematurely inflict a burden which the course of years must unavoidably lay on. Do not our hearts respond to the voice of mirth which echoes from the play-room of our children, and betokens life, happiness, and health? And shall we exchange this for the measured movement, and the subdued tone? Shall we be content to substitute for the sportive plays of nature, for the unconstrained movements of the disembarrassed limb, the regulated step and the adjusted position? The dancing lessons, the calisthenic postures, will of themselves do little to promote happiness or health: rather will they be regarded as irksome tasks,—as part of the routine which prescribes relaxation in the same way that it does lessons, and renders the one almost as fatiguing as the other.

No! let the mind really do its work whilst it should be so occupied, and then let it take wing. It will not, if properly disciplined, be slothful even in its hours of refreshment; it will find in nature,—in the exercises of youth,—in some agreeable, though not arduous pursuit, wherewith to enliven, interest, even instruct it; and it will return to its graver occupation with renewed energy and zest. For unless the animal frame is in healthful action, no mental energy can be expected. Instances may, and do occur, of the spirits rising superior to physical infirmity: but let the invalid student say whether bodily weakness is not the greatest impediment to intellectual effort, and whether even the aspiring flight of genius is not often painfully kept down by the lassitude or irritability of a sickly frame. And if on the early discipline of the mind much of its future tone depends, so the body is affected by its treatment in childhood. Fastidious care, false indulgence, over-anxious nursing must indeed do harm; but whilst these should be avoided, nature should be allowed to expand itself in youth: opportunity should be given for the development of the frame, —for the attainment of that vigour, without which the mind is oppressed by perpetual fetters, and life becomes little better than a gradual decay.

Study is subservient to two important purposes: it furnishes the mind with matter to reflect on, and habituates it to think. But, with reference to these objects, the system alluded to is manifestly deficient. It has been before observed, that it is not uncommon for young persons, who have gone through a laborious education, to be still so unaccustomed to apply their learning, that they are devoid of precise and accurate notions upon any important subject. Although they have spent much time in application, it is in vain to endeavour to detect any train of thought which their study may have suggested.

This disinclination from thought may likewise proceed from a consciousness of imperfect attainment. All may not be mastered that may have been professed to have been learned, and thus a sort of self-deceit may have been indulged. But the mind is irritable under the conviction that it has not really arrived at the proficiency it assumes. It is ashamed of the delusion, and dreads not only that *others*, but that *itself* should detect its own deficiency; and therefore it shrinks from examining its actual attainments, and from ascertaining the imperfection it suspects. It has not the moral courage to draw aside the veil.

Inaccurate instruction is, indeed, the enemy of all thought. Its only word is, go on. But rapidity in learning is dearly purchased at the price of accuracy. The application may be less strict, and the result more immediate; but the permanent effect will be prejudicial. And thence the inexpediency of requiring too much from young persons. The temptation to hurry through what ought to be dwelt upon, to slur over or avoid difficulties, is scarcely to be resisted, when progress is computed by the number of acquirements. When the mind in youth has been disciplined, and accustomed to master all that it undertakes, it is easy to add, at almost any period of life, to the stock of information, — and *one* acquirement well attained is a preparation for many others, and often an introduction to them; but, on the contrary, the bad habit of superficial learning, once contracted, tells upon all our after progress, and indisposes to future application. It is indeed a mistake when parents inquire only what their children learn, instead of discovering what they really know, — when they estimate their proficiency by the number and celebrity of their masters, or by the expensiveness or exclusiveness of their "finishing school." It is as when we see a house loaded with furniture scrupulously selected for its costliness, but the effect of which is any thing but pleasing, — the eye is not refreshed, neither is the taste gratified. For the harmony, — the mind, if one may so speak, — has been wanting, that, with materials of far inferior value, and at a much less expense, will produce a combination that cannot fail to please, and of which the grace and proportion are grateful to the cultivated sense. Thus it is with education. First-rate masters, highly salaried governesses, schools of undisputed fashion and extravagant expense, may be supposed to afford a pledge for the proficiency of the pupil; but unless they do more than fill the brain with a mass of furniture,—unless the spirit of true wisdom is present to guide, select, and apply, the mind will be like the mansion of which we have been speaking, whose heterogeneous and ill-assorted contents only serve to render more conspicuous the unskilfulness of the hand that brought them together. To educate well, the end should be kept in view, and every effort should tend to it. For, as in optics every thing depends upon the lens, and unless the rays are concentered by it, the object represented is vague and indistinct; so, in instruction, — if the various streams of knowledge which we pour in, are not brought to a focus on the intellectual retina, there will be no true pictures traced, no clear ideas conceived; but the mind will be shrouded in a haze between light and darkness, and the spiritual vision will in vain seek to distinguish the shadowy forms that have been so imperfectly delineated.

Study, in its true sense, as has been already said, involves the *entire* application of the mind. In this consists its difficulty; this constitutes its labour; and to an exercise such as this it may not be easy to train the wandering faculties of childhood. But the discipline, although arduous, is satisfactory. Even a child is capable of the pleasure arising from attentive application, and may taste in embryo the de-lights of that pursuit of knowledge, of which the philosopher is so much enamoured. To induce the habit of concentrating the power of the mind is an achievement worthy the labour of the teacher, and far more deserving the gratitude of the pupil than the communication of any mere matter of information.

CHAPTER VIII.

STUDY — ITS ADVANTAGES.

THE prejudice against the encouragement of study in the female sex arises, probably, from the fear of its detracting from the softness and gentleness of their character. Were this really its tendency, the drawback would be insuperable. But it is not in the nature of knowledge, or of its pursuit, to produce any such result.

It may indeed be urged, that whilst the most profoundly learned are usually the most humble, because they are so aware of their distance from the object at which they aim, that they are never satisfied with their own proficiency; yet that this is not the case with those of inferior attainment, and that the scanty knowledge which at the most women can ever compass, is just that which is likely to produce vanity and conceit.

Still, it is not the precise degree of information that may be possessed, but the manner in which study is pursued, which influences the character; and whatever may be the point of progress, the effect of the discipline necessary to any advance in the road towards true knowledge, is to create self-distrust and humility. Initiate a child for ever so short a distance in the right road, — show her how difficult it is to realize one step, — teach her to compare her progress, not with any thing behind, but with what is before her; and she will receive a moral lesson every time that she applies to study, and will rise from her books in the spirit of meekness, and with a disposition to disparage her own powers.

It is ignorance which is the mother of conceit. Has the philospher, by the force of his original genius, or by the patience of his research, discovered some hitherto unknown principle, some hidden property or process which accounts for phenomena deemed inexplicable, or of which the application may achieve or facilitate the most arduous operation: where has he to encounter the most inveterate prejudice, the most bigoted and self-opinionated opposition? Is it not from the ignorant, — from those who cannot understand him; who are too narrow-minded to comprehend his views, and too unacquainted with mental discipline to value their results?

Or, has the enlightened theologian by the influence of the Divine Spirit, by the assiduous and faithful examination of the word of God, discovered, in spite of notions instilled in early youth, of traditions which pretend to the sanction of antiquity, truth which for long may have been obscured, and brought to light principles of pure faith, which had been defaced and overlaid? Where has he ever found the greatest bar to the diffusion of the heavenly knowledge? Where has he met with the most unreasonable attachment to old errors, with the most confident assertion of infallibility? Has it not been amongst those whom ignorance has blinded, who knew nothing of what they either supported or opposed, but with whom prescription was argument, and authority proof?

And, without looking to the notorious examples of former times, ordinary life affords daily proofs that those, who know the least, are usually the most self-confident. If we wish to correct a mistake, — to persuade to the adoption of an opinion, — to explain a proposed improvement, we expect the greatest difficulty from those of uncultivated minds. To take a familiar illustration, — it is not uncommon for the mistress of a family even to forego the use of an invention calculated to facilitate some domestic process, not because she is not herself aware of the advantage it offers, but because some old servant cannot be put out of her beaten track. And it is the same in all arts. Those who are merely manual labourers, who know nothing of the spirit of science, are the most impracticable in all questions of improvement; and a readiness to learn is always found in an inverse proportion to the deficiency of information.

Why then should there be so much jealousy of imparting knowledge to women? Why should not their minds be so fully disciplined, as to secure at least their proficiency in what they do attempt? Why should they not be trained in the path of true wisdom, and rendered not merely the recipients of a little learning, but the lovers of knowledge and truth.

In society, conversation on ordinary topics, and to a certain point, may be fairly supported by women, whatever be the degree of their intellectual attainment. But subjects of greater interest will arise, and on these differences of opinion be called forth. There can be little question with whom, amongst the sex, discussion is the most agreeable; who is the most open to conviction, — the freest from prejudice: and on the other hand, who is the most vehement in expression, the most determined partisan, the least disposed to yield a point in candour and good humour. On such as bring to an argument little information, even truth can make slight impression; and, whether in company or in domestic privacy, a difference of opinion with them is apt to lead to unpleasant dispute. But with a woman of mind it is quite otherwise; *she*, at least, is tolerant of diversity of sentiment; she knows that it is no easy matter to arrive at a correct judgment; she is capable of understanding, and is probably familiar with the arguments on either side; and should she be guilty of an occasional display of learning, even this fault is more tolerable than the conceit of those who have no pretensions.

To guard, however, against vanity, let it be the care of the instructors of youth to check the movements of self-applause. Doubtless, there is a danger of a clever girl's experiencing an elation of spirit, when she compares her own advance with that of her companions. Nor is it wise to attempt to deceive her as to her own powers. It is as useless as to endeavour to convince a beautiful child that she is not handsome, when her mirror recalls to her the truth. In both cases, it is better to admit the superiority, but to assign to it no more than its real value. A child, especially of intellectual promise, should be addressed as a reflecting and responsible being. She should be reminded of her relative position, not with regard to others, but to what she herself is to pursue,—of all that she has to learn before she can be said to know any thing,—of all that the really wise have achieved, and of their deep humility. She should be shown, with every step that she advances, what is still before her; and whilst she may be conscious of her progress, should be taught to feel that it is nothing extraordinary. Nor should it ever be forgotten, that although intellectual discipline is an important part of education, it is very subordinate to the formation of the moral character, and is indeed chiefly to be attended to as it subserves this end. If the right tone is given, no ill effects need be feared from mental attainment.

The most effectual antidote against conceit will be found in a religious sentiment, — not a mere acknowledgment of Deity, a philosophic veneration for the Almighty Creator, — but a practical faith in the revelation and doctrines of the Gospel. This is the safeguard for the enlightened woman, which will preserve her from all the arrogance of false science, and direct her attainments into the only channel which will prove beneficial to others and to herself. For Christianity sets intellectual, as well as all other human attainments, in their true light, and affixes the character not merely of folly, but of sin, on all self-confidence. The soul, under the influence of religion, is in a state wholly different from that in which it was when unaffected by it; and though the evil propensities are repressed, not eradicated, — and pride and vanity, like all other mementos of our fallen nature, are liable to be called forth, yet the curb is laid upon them, and the mind is in some measure restored to its primeval capacity of rightly applying, and not perverting, that which in itself is good.

Study, it has been already said, is a discipline favourable to the exercise of virtue. It predisposes to, as well as assists in, the attainment of moral excellence. Even with reference to religion, studious habits, as a secondary cause, are more conducive than any other to a spiritual frame of mind. This may especially be observed in youth, and amongst young women. Before the innate propensities to evil have gathered strength, whilst the mind is under the plastic influence of education, the very calmness of temperament produced by study affords opportunity for religious questions, and invites to their consideration; and those, who are accustomed to reflect on every subject, will not pass by points which stand on the very threshold of inquiry, but will turn in upon themselves, and willingly entertain and prosecute researches which, when made in simplicity and candour, seldom fail to lead to truth. Prejudice has but little sway over the young spirit; the sordidness of the world has not yet contracted, nor infused that selfish policy which, at a later period, often counteracts the honest impressions of the judgment, and checks the better impulses of the heart; and those young people, whose attention is not wasted upon trifles, whose faculties are not debased by an application to unprofitable occupations, are, of all others, the most likely to follow up their convictions, and to apprehend the deep mysteries of faith. Not unfrequently have such been led in the course of their own thoughts so to trace effects to their true causes, and pursue principles to their conclusions, that they have arrived at views far more enlightened and comprehensive than any they have received from human instruction.

If habits of study are thus favourable to the formation of religious principle, they are no less congenial to the Christian temper and to the exercise of Christian graces. It is one of the excellences of religion, that it opens the mind to the true value of knowledge, and applies it to its most important use. Religion is indeed the true pancrusion, which converts into precious metal all that is susceptible of such a process. And it is easy so see how intellectual and moral discipline have a mutual influence on the understanding and the heart; for if, as has been already remarked, intellectual culture is often conducive to moral improvement, so, on the other hand, the reception of religious truth (unless there is some counteracting influence) expands the mind, and leads it to exert itself in profitable studies. A young woman, if a serious Christian, sees at once that the cultivation of her understanding is a religious duty,—that the faculties of her mind are amongst the most valuable talents for which she is responsible, — that the improvement of them is especially calculated to increase her power of doing good,—and that the attainment of knowledge in all its branches is a pursuit than which there is scarcly any higher, and which is on every account worthy her attention; and therefore she is to enrich her understanding, to strengthen her reason, and to improve her mind, and by so doing she will be herself an able supporter of the truth, and will be in little danger of being led away from it by any cunningly devised system.

There may, indeed, be some who, from a deep sense of the all-engrossing importance of *one* object, are jealous of any thing which seems to divert the mind in the slightest degree from its immediate pursuit; but is not, in truth, that object pursued, when we are seeking what elevates the soul, and reveals to the pious mind, at every step of its progress, more of the excellence of Christian virtue, and above all of the Divine perfections? It would be endless to show how every path of true knowledge leads to the Author of all Truth; how clearly the believer traces the providence, wisdom, and love of God in every inquiry into His natural or moral government; how, from all the workings of the human understanding,—the various developments of character,—from the discoveries of philosophy,—from even the errors of the ignorant, or the conceits or sophisms of the falsely learned, lessons of heavenly wisdom may be drawn, which at once display the infinite excellence of the Revelation which Divine mercy has vouchsafed, and furnish the most persuasive arguments for its belief. Nor must we overlook the collateral benefits derived from intellectual culture, —the influence it gives the Christian, — the manner in which it lessens or removes prejudice, and the accuracy that it imparts to the judgment. In the scale of Christian obligation there are *direct* duties, religious and social, which, as has been remarked, have the first claim upon us, and are to be first considered; but there may be found, especially in youth, an abundance of leisure, which, if not improved in mental culture, will be assuredly either trifled away or misspent. There is a restless activity in the mind of youth, which must find some employment: give it a right direction, occupy it by wholesome exercise, and it will be an efficient impulse leading on to improvement; but neglect thus to afford it matter on which to spend itself, and it will sprout out in some branch of unseemly growth, which the hand of the pruner must exscind. Can we really imagine that it is better to dream away youth and life, than to improve them to the attainment of knowledge,—that there is less danger in doing nothing, than in intellectual pursuits,—or that the serious trifles which are sometimes had recourse to, for the sake of occupying leisure and diversifying employment, are a more legitimate and worthy occupation, than the culture of those faculties which are the distinction of our species, and which we look forward to as being perfected in that state for which *this* is an education? Every intelligent Christian, woman as well as man, of a well-ordered, well-instructed mind, is an accession to the Christian name: we feel that she has *that* within her which will secure her from the narrowness of party spirit, or from the mistakes of a misdirected judgment; that she is qualified to act her part with wisdom and sober-mindedness, as well as with honesty and zeal; and that she is better able to fulfil every duty,—to co-operate in every philanthropic effort,—to occupy her station in society,—to instruct, persuade, please,—than any who are inferior to her in intellectual proficiency.

Let us not then fear to encourage in our young women a taste for study; but let it be rather our care so accurately to store their minds with the elements of knowledge, that they may feel the value of what they have already learned, and may desire to pursue the path they have entered, to the utmost limit of their capability. At the same time, by the infusion of principles which humble whilst they elevate the soul, and which, by establishing the pre-eminent claims of Heaven as the first object of desire and pursuit, damp all undue ardour for the attainment of any thing earthly, let us teach them, that to however high a point mental improvement may be carried, it should be valued chiefly as conducive to that excellence which should be the constant aim and the main purpose of the heaven-born spirit.

In the preceding remarks on study no pursuits have been particularly urged, — the object having been, rather to suggest a few practical hints on the general mode and advantages of application, than to point out what *individual* judgment can better ascertain.

There are few branches of knowledge which may not be applied to a useful purpose, and which do not at least involve in their attainment that exercise of mind which is so beneficial to the pupil; and as there are many that in themselves are equally important and interesting, should we not, in their selection, consult the indications given by young people themselves? It is surely wiser to comply with the bent of the pupil, than to run the risk of thwarting a natural taste, for the sake of forcing one which may never be imparted.

There have occurred instances where the mind has appeared disinclined to all effort, until its peculiar bias has manifested itself, and has acted as a stimulus to the slumbering faculties; and if we observe the relative facility with which young people acquire, or the zest with which they apply to their different branches of instruction, we shall discover in most instances that nature has pointed out certain lines in which there is greater probability than in others of attaining to excellence.

There may be a hesitation in allowing this, or a doubt as to the expediency of consulting the natural preference, and some may feel disposed to educate on a contrary principle. They would, for instance, prescribe Euclid to the imaginative, and endeavour to excite the fancy of the more sober pupil by a course of poetry and elegant literature. But although some counterpoise may be necessary to preserve a right balance, mediocrity — not excellence — is the probable result of a counteracting system; and the fact that first-rate minds almost invariably choose for themselves some one object, — and by diligently pursuing *that*, attain to superiority, — proves, that the use and concentration of willing energies are far more likely to produce proficiency, than a coerced application of faculties indisposed to their task. In respect, indeed, to all propensities, intellectual or moral, which are capable of being improved to a good and useful purpose, it is the business of education to discipline, but not to counteract.

Let it not, however, be supposed by these remarks, that all our young ladies are to be made *learned* women. The extent of acquirement should be determined by the capacity, taste, station, and leisure of the pupil. Still, whatever may be the degree of knowledge, early habits of application are equally important. If these are contracted, the progress, to whatever point limited, will be complete, and the effect upon the character beneficial. And it may reasonably be hoped, that young women, thus trained, will be more humble, feminine, and teachable, than those whose education has been more imperfect, or whose faculties have been employed chiefly upon trifling matters.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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